The Difference Between Us

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/9566846.

Rating: Explicit
Archive Warning: Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category: F/M
Fandom: Game of Thrones (TV), A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin, A Song of Ice and Fire & Related Fandoms
Relationship: Jon Snow/Arya Stark, Arya Stark/Gendry Waters
Character: Arya Stark, Jon Snow, Gendry Waters, Tormund Giantsbane, Brienne of Tarth, Davos Seaworth, Jaime Lannister, Other Character Tags to Be Added, Sansa Stark (mentioned), Satin (Game of Thrones), Podrick Payne, Satin Flowers
Additional Tags: Cousin Incest, Love Triangles, Mental Instability, Dark, Madness, Explicit Language, Explicit Sexual Content, Sex, Smut, Violence, Dubious Morality, Mildly Dubious Consent, Internal Conflict, The Author Regrets Nothing, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Alternate Universe, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Dark Jon Snow, Cunnilingus, Oral Sex, Orgasm, Love Confessions, Making Love, Vaginal Fingering, Complete, jonrya, jonarya - Freeform
Stats: Published: 2017-02-04 Completed: 2019-04-25 Chapters: 20/20 Words: 51722

The Difference Between Us

by SoHereWeAre

Summary

The Wars are over and the Long Night has finally come to an end. But at what price to Arya and Jon? Will either of them finally be able to reconcile their feelings for each other and be at peace?

This has both parings: Arya/Jon and Arya/Gendry. Heed the tags! Jon/Arya is the main relationship. Not to be taken too seriously, this is just my little fantasy contribution.

Notes
See the end of the work for notes
Prologue

Dark. Dark, cold. Cold even as fur tickled her nose...

And wet, wet on her cheek.

Arya's eyes fluttered open to the sound of panting and whining and she caught sight of a pair of glowing red eyes and bright white fur against the moonlight.

"Ghost," she muttered, trying to shove the beast away. It did little good; the direwolf, even bigger than her Nymeria, barely budged. So much for once being the runt of the litter.

She changed her mind about his leaving when she noticed the fire had burned out in the hearth in front of her bed. It left the air nearly frigid and she could see her breath when she sighed. Ghost radiated heat and she buried her face into his fur, lost for a moment in one of the rare comforts left to her. He was softer than Nymeria, but then again Ghost preferred to stay close to the Winterfell castle whereas Nymeria was constantly on the hunt in the snowy woods. Ghost had taken to sleeping in her chambers since she arrived a little over two moons ago. Typically he stayed at the foot of her bed, but that was when there was a roaring fire.

Reluctantly she rolled away from him, yanking back the fur covers. Immediately she shivered in her shift; it was thick and warm, provided there was a fire nearby. She padded quickly over to the hearth and immediately crouched down to do a servant's work, not that it mattered. What was the point in calling for anyone in the middle of the night, when she could manage just fine. All the years away from home had taught her life skills of every kind, and if she couldn't handle starting a fire, then there was something else wrong with her. Well something else wrong with her.

In no time the fire blazed warmth into her face. Ghost whined and made his way back to the foot of the bed to curl up on a pile of furs while Arya stared into the flames. In her mind she heard the screaming of the Red Woman as the fire licked her limbs, her sensuous body turning to a charred mass and then to ash. One off her list, her list that has long since been finished. All dead. All gone. Along with her family.

Except Jon. Or, what was left of Jon.

It had taken so long to travel from Storm's End, and now that she was here she wished she had never arrived. It wasn't the cold that bothered her; winter was in her bones, but this winter has been exceptionally long. Everyone expected the Long Night to fade when the Wars were won, and they had dreamed of a spring that still remained elusive. Even Dorne had been affected with colder weather, and the Night King's demise at Jon's hands did nothing to ease the climate conditions. Maester Sam predicted spring was imminent, but to the nearly starving masses it was hardly a consolation.

Arya closed her eyes for a moment to still the screaming in her head. She felt nothing for the Red Woman except relief that she was gone, but sometimes the piercing cries echoed and intermingled with other sounds of agony and terror. Voices of the dead followed her, tormented her and she was a prisoner of them; she could not escape.

Just as she could not escape her brother's - no, cousin's - own demons.
Breaking Fast

Breaking fast was always a somber affair, and sparse.

Arya entered the hall and slunk into her seat next to Jon; there was no one else attending. Arya strained to remember a time where the whole family would gather three times a day for feasting, the hall bustling with noise and laughter, the tables overflowing with delightful fare. No one really worried about where the meal came from, and no one fretted over the portions. Tapers were lit excessively to ward off the gloom, and conversations abounded, overlapping.

She looked down at the broth and undefinable meat on the plate.

"I'm not sure what it is, either, but it's best not to ask," Jon stated flatly, leaning back in his seat. She observed he hadn't touched his meal, and wasn't for certain if it was because he was waiting on her or if he held distaste for the offering.

"It looks like it hasn't died yet," she offered, stabbing at the piece of rare, flesh-colored meat. "I thought for sure we would have a shipment from Essos by now."

"With the sea just now thawing, it will take some time."

Affording a side ways look at him, she sipped at her drink. She couldn't even define the drink at this point either. He looked as impeccable as always, dressed in a black tunic and breeches, his hair tied back. His dark eyes had alighted when she came in and then reverted back to dull pools of black. The scars on his face seemed more pronounced this morning, accenting his handsome face, some hidden by his closely trimmed beard. Arya knew they, as the last remnants of the Stark line, were always compared favorably in looks, having the same dark eyes and hair. She supposed it was more of an assertion to Jon's right to Lord of Winterfell because of his mother. His Targaryen blood was downplayed and ignored ever since he refused the Iron Throne upon the death of Daenerys. Instead, he named the newly legitimized Gendry Baratheon as his successor. A common man for the common people, the choice was not without some protest, mostly from the noblemen. Gendry not only had the backing of the common folk, who saw him as one of their own, but from all previous Baratheon and Targ supporters alike, having both lineages in his blood. Jon's refusal of King and Gendry's ascension was surreal enough, but with what they had seen with the White Walkers and Wights and Dragons, a former bastard as King was not so implausible.

What was surprising is that Gendry had chosen Storm's End as his dwelling. Arya had understood the reasoning behind it, and she had no fond memory of King's Landing. It had been decimated anyway when first Cersei used Wildfire to destroy nearly a third of it before Jaime took her down, and then it was ravaged when the Night King sought to obliterate them all. The people lauded him for the move; and with him went Ser Davos as his hand, while Jon returned to Winterfell. She knew Jon was tired, battle-weary, done with Kings and intrigue and power, only wanting to know a moment of rest and peace.

For them, there never would be true peace; not internally. They had seen too much, done too much, felt too much. Yet they were still breathing, still surviving after all that have fallen. And the stillness of Winterfell was nearly suffocating them.

So now the seasoned fighter and savior of their world were both reduced to discussing foodstuffs while contemplating mystery meat on the table in front of him. However, there were more important things to discuss that he had been avoiding since her arrival.
Arya tugged at her hair that hung down over her shoulder in a single messy plait. She wasn't used to her hair being so long, always preferring it shorter and out of the way for fighting. Now there was no fighting to be had so she just let it go. Just like she traded in breeches for simple gowns, at least for meal times. When she rode or felt like sparring she still wore her breeches and tunics, and there was no one around to disapprove of it. It seemed Jon was most comfortable around her when she dressed for fighting instead of like a Lady.

"Jon, I've been here for over two moons now, and I need an answer, not that it matters in the end. You know I will do what I want to do."

"Aye, you always do what you want to do. This should be no different. I often wonder why you even came here."

She looked him straight in the eye and he raised his eyebrows, a glimpse of a smile forming on his face, taking the sting out of his words, challenging her. She knew that look, that Arya does whatever she damn well wants look. For a moment he looked amused, almost looked like the the Jon she remembered as a little girl, and for some reason her heart skipped.

"It is different. This is -"

"I know. You would be more than Lady of Winterfell. You would be the Queen."

He averted his gaze then, bending over to stick a piece of meat into his mouth and chew furiously, followed by a hard swallow.

"It isn't about titles, Jon."

"I hardly see you as one who would entertain the thought of a husband, even if he was a King. I think you would rather kick a man in the balls rather than be tied to him as a wife and all that being a wife would entail."

"It's Gendry. Not some stranger."

"Do you love him?" He said it quietly, evenly, but he still did not look at her. Instead he threw a piece of meat down to Ghost, who was seated beside him on the other side. Ghost merely sniffed sat it and sat on his haunches in disgust.

Arya didn't know what to say for once. Love? What was love, really? She knew love of family. Love of revenge and justice and love for the kill. Love of a man? While flowering into a woman she was fighting and killing and surviving. The closest she had ever come to love was after her reunion with Gendry, when she had her first kiss before the war began. There was no time for such frivolity as love and romance, at least that's what she told herself even as Gendry's lips made her knees weak and she pressed her body into his.

"What about you, Jon? As Lord of Winterfell you should take a wife, shouldn't you? If Gendry dies without heirs, the crown would revert back to you."

"We aren't concerned with a marriage alliance for me at the moment. You, on the other hand, have an offer now."

"Yes, and I have asked for time with my family to discuss the offer."

"Time with me, you mean? What family do we have left, Ayra? Robb, Sansa, Bran, Rickon, all gone. Father - I mean, Uncle Ned - gone, Catelyn gone, Benjen gone. So, time with me to discuss the marriage offer. What does it matter? If I advise against the match, you will do it anyway. If I
encourage the match, you will probably defy that."

"I care what you think, Jon. You are my brother."

"Cousin." A muscle worked in his jawline. "I am your cousin, Arya."

"Brother, cousin, whatever. You are my family."

He stood up then, pushing back from the table, the chair scraping and echoing in the hall. Ghost jumped to his feet at attention and Arya turned her eyes up to meet Jon's. He looked down at her, his mouth in a grim, set line.

"You will do what you want so just do it. Either way you know you have my approval."

With that, he strode out of the hall, Ghost trotting beside him, leaving Arya sitting silence. Moments passed before the only sound in the room was the cutting of toughened meat.
The Void

He desired nothing more than one moment of peace. One moment to finally rest, lie down all the fighting, and strife, and heartache and just be still, calm. The wars have ended, the kingdom has united, warring factions have settled. There was no need to constantly carry his sword by his side, no battles to plan, no life to risk losing, no secrets waiting to be revealed.

Yet the peace never reached his mind.

Jon stared into the flames of his bedroom hearth. When he stared he was reminded of Melisandre and her bringing him back to life, not once but twice. Even after he had banished her, she had returned, risking her own life. Arya had killed her mercilessly and without a conscience; all over her buying Gendry from the Brotherhood Without Banners and her intent to kill him. That knowledge alone was enough to know that Arya's feelings for the boy - no, man - was more than a mere developed friendship.

*Twice killed, twice resurrected, and he felt more dead now than ever.*

Deferring the crown to Gendry and retaining his title as Lord of Winterfell was one of the two things he hasn't lived to regret, along with defeating the Night King, even if it meant losing the Dragon Queen in the process. He never wanted to be King. He always secretly wished to be Lord of Winterfell, and envied Robb his title. There was no envy now, only a detached sadness when he thought of his brother. No, cousin.

His cousin.

It was Sam who brought him the documents of the secret marriage of his parents, and it was Jon who threw them into the fire and swore Sam to secrecy. All his life he wished nothing more than to not be a bastard but post-war he clung to it. Post-war, the labels of bastard and trueborn held less meaning, as now Jon was a Lord, but a King still was required to be legitimate. Gendry had been legitimized by Dany before the final battle, with Jon's approval. With Gendry as the last surviving son of King Robert, and having the Targ blood through him, it was easy to pass the crown to him, as Dany had no other legitimate heirs. Had Dany survived, Jon was sure she would have a marriage either with Gendry or with himself, and at least with her death he avoided the quandary of possibly marrying his aunt. That was something Jon would never do: engage in sexual relations with his aunt, even if she had been stunningly beautiful.

*Beauty. Beauty was not silver hair and sitting on a dragon. Beauty was a fierce warrior with dark hair and grey eyes. Beauty was not being self-entitled to a throne and killing to claim it. Beauty was an assassin killing in the name of revenge for her family.*

Arya, Lady of Winterfell, the only family left to him.

*Queen Arya. King Gendry.*

He knew nothing of this version of his sister. No, his cousin. She had returned to Winterfell when he was away making alliances and joining Dany to prepare for the Long Winter and take over King's Landing. By the time he returned, the Wall had fallen and the final war had begun. There was little time for a happy reunion, besides a few moments of conversation. After the initial hug, Jon felt more hesitation than joy, more uncertainty than relief that his sister - cousin - was alive and well. He looked into her eyes and what he found was reflected in his own.

*She was alive, but not well.*
The fire crackled and sputtered around the logs. Sparks flew, like the sparks from the dragons. All three, dead now. Dead like all the mysticism in the realm. There was no magic, no wonder in this world anymore. No Faceless Men. No Red Witches. If he died now, there was nothing to bring him back, just as there was nothing waiting for him when he died for good. Nothing was left in this world but basic survival in a never-ending winter. The people in the North were starting to starve from the lack of food; he knew some of the meat the Wildlings lived off of was of their own dead. The south fared little better, as the winter stretched to King's Landing and beyond, even across the sea to Essos. The Dothraki had been nearly wiped out, having no resources or ability to handle the harsh conditions. The North and the Wildlings were able to sustain their lives more than the southern countries, but even at this point things were growing bleak. Sam had promised the dream of spring was imminent but Jon doubted his assurances.

He doubted everything.

Queen Arya.

Would Arry marry that greenboy? Well, no, he wasn't a greenboy. He was his own age. Gendry fought skillfully with his warhammer, forged Valyrian steel, garnered the love of the common people, and apparently won the affections of a girl who once deemed boys as disgusting and smelly. The people old enough to remember Robert at the pinnacle of his glory remarked that Gendry was a replica of his warrior father: coal black hair, piercing blue eyes, handsome, tall of stature, and muscled.

King Gendry.

Jon raised a trembling hand to trace the scars on his face. Some from the Night's Watch, some from this battle and that one, and the final one. His whole body was mapped in scars. Scars that constantly reminded him of what he was and what he will never be. His body was tired. His mind was tired. Here he was, Lord of Winterfell as he had always dreamed, and somehow, it meant nothing. He was empty. Void.

Ghost whined, lying beside his chair. Jon withdrew his hand from his face to stroke his fur and his shaking subsided in the warmth of his direwolf. Direwolves were the only magic left in the world, and he knew of only Ghost and Nymeria. Supposedly Nymeria ran with a pack of them beyond where the Wall used to be, but he nor anyone who still resided at Castle Black had spotted any. Nymeria came around occasionally, but spent most of her time away. Much like Arya, who had travelled to Storm's Landing after the wars and only returned now to discuss a marriage proposal that could have been done by raven. The travel had been long and painstakingly slow due to the harsh conditions, but no one told Lady Arya Stark of Winterfell what to do. She had only Brienne of Tarth as her companion.

Stubborn. He remembered that of her. Little else.

He left a little girl behind.

This matured, damaged woman was a stranger to him.

She still carried Needle.

His thoughts broke when he heard a pounding at his door as Ghost padded over to scratch at it. He knew immediately it couldn't be Arya. He would know that forceful knock anywhere.

"Come in." His voice boomed.
Tormund Giantsbane came thundering in, stopping to give Ghost a good scratch before striding over to Jon, scroll in hand, with Ghost lying back down. Since losing Ser Davos to Gendry, Tormund had become his valued advisor as well as his closest friend. Even he was starting to look drained, and grey was starting to show through his red beard. He had scars as well and his nose had been broken so many times it looked oddly set. He leaned over, handing him the paper then retreating two steps.

"Sam at the Citadel." Tormund was a man of few words.

Bleary-eyed, Jon broke the seal and unrolled it, scanning. He leaned back in his chair, allowing a shadow of a smile, to which Tormund's bushy eyebrows raised up, both in question and surprise at something from him other than a scowl or a pensive brood.

"Spring is coming."
"Milady?"

Arya looked over her shoulder to see Brienne approaching her in the kitchens. Stoic and tall and as formidable as ever, her dark blonde hair tied back in a severe knot, she stood at attention and formally addressed her, which of course instantly annoyed Arya. Gendry annoyed her when he insisted on addressing her as such, although he did it for amusement and Brienne was doing it out of formality.

"Lady Brienne, Arya suits me just fine. I don't need titles." She turned back around to her survey of the pantries, which she observed wasn't going to take long. No wonder why everyone looked gaunt. If there would happen to be another war upon them, she was certain not many would have the strength to fight.

"You are far different from your sister, Arya," Brienne remarked, to which Arya visibly tensed. She didn't turn back around but she heard the contrite tone."I'm sorry, I didn't mean -"

"It's fine."

It was and it wasn't. Sansa was a subject Arya never wanted to discuss, not with anyone. The painful memory of her sister saddened and angered her at the same time. After years apart, their reunion was both joyful and terse; it was good to have their family together again, before the final war with the Night King. Sansa proved to hold her own intellectually, not just though the intrigues that accompanied the downfall and death of Queen Cersei, but in her handling of Petyr Baelish's betrayal and execution, and she also had influence over the North's alliance with Dany, using her clout as the eldest trueborn Stark to gain support and loyalty. She may have not been skilled with swords but she was armed with formidable cunning, made all the more sharp from the abuse she had suffered at the hands of madmen. Arya had been proud of her but there was little time for family bonding.

Then the marriage happened.

With Jon's true parentage revealed, Sansa and Jon had married in the Godswood in surprising haste, to Arya's shock, disbelief, and acute heartache. King and Queen In The North. To the realm it made political sense; Stark and Targaryen united, but Arya suspected the haste was a way for Jon to avoid being thrust into a marriage with Daenerys, as well as strengthen his claim to the Stark heritage. Sansa for her part was shrewd enough to see the advantage not only politically but emotionally; once married to Jon, she could never be forced into a union with a cruel, unknown man. No matter what the reasons, they obviously consummated the marriage, as Sansa rapidly became with child. It mattered little in the end, as a fever and illness took the life of both her sister and the unborn child within a month of the pregnancy announcement. Jon seemed to genuinely mourn his losses but with the wars, there was no time to grieve. Surely Dany wasted little time in extending a marriage proposal of her own to her widowed nephew.

Never in her lifetime did Arya ever think Jon would marry someone like Sansa. It wasn't as if Sansa cared much for Jon when they were young; quite the contrary, she preferred the company of Robb and looked down on Jon for being a bastard. Catastrophic events make strange bedfellows, apparently. Arya refused to talk to Sansa about Jon at any point in their scant interactions; she preferred to not know any details or explanations. She focused on the wars at hand instead.
Truthfully, her heart and head could not reconcile the fact that her sister shared a bed with Jon, even if for only a brief time, and in those mornings Sansa would always break her fast with a soft blush and smile on her face that somehow made her even more beautiful and made Arya's feelings towards her more ugly.

Brienne cleared her throat; a nervous gesture that was completely out of character.

"Arya, a raven came today."

She turned around then to raise her eyes to the towering woman, acutely aware of her own petite, short stature, and suddenly felt inadequate. She could never be equal to the strong Brienne and she could never compare to the lovely Sansa...

"From Gendry?" A nervous hitch entered her voice. It was too soon. He said he would give her the time she needed to consider his offer of marriage. Sweet Gendry, he told her to take the time she needed to consult her family, all the while a respectful yet mischievous sparkle dancing in his bright blue eyes. He has seemed so self-assured that she would be his bride. His cocky attitude amused her and flattered her as well. Briefly she imagined what it would be like to bed him and thought maybe it would be amusing...and fun.

"From the Citadel. Spring is coming." Brienne's hand flexed on the pommel of Oathkeeper as Arya dragged her thoughts away from her prospective betrothed. "The Long Winter has finally come to an end."

The announcement should have flooded relief and happiness in Arya, but she felt nothing. What did it matter, if spring was on the way? So, it would mean snow and ice would no longer blanket the south, and there would be opportunity for vegetation to increase the food supply. But that mattered little to the dead. To all the dead. And the dying.

"Does Jon know?"

"Tormund gave him the scroll earlier."

Arya noticed the softness in Brienne's voice as she spoke, and was not surprised. She knew the Lady of Tarth had affection for the Wildling. Well, and an affection for the Kingslayer/Queenslayer Jaime Lannister. She felt some pity for the woman; being in love with two men at the same time no doubt presented double the aggravation.

"Arya, may I speak freely."

"Yes. Of course. Please, no formalities with me. I've been with the Brotherhood Without Banners, trained with the Faceless Men, traveled and hid across the land, fought for my life. I saw Robb's men murdered, was there when my father was beheaded; I've killed men, women, wights, white walkers. I've buried my only sister and my brother. I have no need for the propriety of yesteryear."

Arya could never stand in one place for too long; she motioned for Brienne to follow her out of the kitchens to walk the halls. It was mid-day but torches were lit in the dark corridors. Soon there would be more light. Soon.

"I know the King is a patient man and cares deeply for you, but how long will we be here in Winterfell? If I may suggest, with this news, that we remain here until the weather relents? It would make traveling to Storm's End a bit easier on us. The journey here was treacherous at best."

"Is there more reason than that to stay?" It was meant for it to be a jibe at Brienne's interest in Tormund, but it was lost in translation. She tugged at the sleeves of her dark grey wool gown, a
simple affair with fur lining. She still wasn't used to constantly wearing the attire of a highborn lady; sometimes she still longed for her simple breeches and tunic, just as much as she longed to take up traveling and enjoying the Seven Kingdoms, now that there was no longer a price on her head. *All I ever wanted was to return home after father was killed. Now, I cannot get away fast enough.*

Brienne looked straight ahead, slowing her gait to Arya's far shorter legs. She appreciated that; the only other person who was thoughtful enough to defer to her gait was Jon. As it was, she developed a fast walk out of necessity.

"I believe Jon is trapped here in Winterfell. He claims this is where he needs and wants to be, but I cannot help but feel he is lacking something. Family, perhaps. It is hard to tell what he is feeling, really, and his brooding has always been a part of him but he seems...lost." She paused before continuing, as if she thought she was breaching some invisible line. "Jon has been a fighter for so long, has lost a great deal, and now that peace has replaced the strife, I fear he doesn't know how to make peace with himself."

"Jon is stronger than everyone thinks," Arya protested.

Even as she spoke, it rang hollow in her heart. Even she knew Jon seemed to be fading away, and she hadn't been around him as much as others have. Part of the reason she made the journey to Winterfell was to make sure Jon has reached some stability and peace, and she knew when she looked at him she was peering into the eyes of a stranger. It was the reason she planned on extending her stay here and pondering over the marriage proposal at length.

"Arya, you both are the last of the Stark line. Winterfell and the North would benefit greatly with the both of you working together to rebuild and grow. Perhaps Jon needs the strength of you, of family, to rediscover his own."

For a moment Arya closed her eyes, remembering Jon gifting her with Needle. She recalled sadness at his leaving but also the happiness and excitement; she felt him securing her in his waiting arms as she nestled into his warmth for a hug. It may as well been a lifetime ago, not only eight years. She still had Needle, but did she still have Jon? So much has happened and the bond they shared when they were younger felt as if it never existed. Too much separation, too many deaths and sorrows and endless struggles and pain seemed to widen the gulf that their time apart had created. Jon wasn't *Jon* anymore, and she was his little sister no longer.

*I've known strangers better than I know Jon now.*

She made no reply as she continued walking with Brienne, a sharp pang reminding her that even a deadened heart may still feel.

Chapter End Notes

I know this update was a long time coming, and I apologize. I've made the mistake of having two fics going on at once with very little spare time. Rest assured I am staying with this, I promise some interesting times ahead, but of course I needed to lay down some backstory! Thank you!
The howling ripped Jon from his dreamless sleep and he bolted upright in bed, sweat trickling down his chest, the furs pushed aside. The fire in his hearth had died but he was strangely warm. Even though Ned and Cate's old solar was the warmest room in the castle, the Long Winter still required a fire burning at night.

It wasn't as if it Ghost was particularly loud; he was far into the night and no doubt in the woods beyond the castle, but he heard him all the same, heard him calling out. It was a cry of discovered prey. He was a far better hunter than Jon, naturally, and it wasn't the first time he woke him out of a much-needed deep slumber.

It took no time for him to draw on his breeches and tunic and struggle with his boots and furs and gloves, grabbing Longclaw before making his way out of his chambers and down the corridor. It was an automatic reaction even as his head felt dizzy, clouded. He had no idea what time it was, only that it was still pitch dark, not that the darkness ever really dissipated anymore. There was no movement throughout the castle, only a few guards standing at attention, acknowledging him along the way. It was no uncommon for Jon to roam around at night, so little did he sleep, that they didn't question or move from their posts. Only the heavy thud of his boots echoing around the halls could be heard. He hesitated in front of Arya's solar for only a moment. She would no doubt love to hunt with him but he was loath to wake her. He knew she had not been sleeping well since she arrived, and he decided against rousing her. If she had already been awake he was sure she would have already been ready.

He hurried his way out, across the courtyard to the stables. There were so few horses left, less than a dozen. His mount whickered at him in greeting while he saddled him and grabbed a massive burlap sack and rope. His arms felt strangely like lead and it took much more effort than usual to pull himself on. Urging the horse forward, they made their way out of the gate, receiving a small bow from the gatekeeper. The air somehow didn't feel as cold as usual, and Jon noticed an unusual warmth around his collar. Inwardly he cursed as his steed pressed forward. He hadn't felt well for a few days but brushed it off as an after-effect of continuously eating less than savory meal offerings. Maybe it wasn't wise to ride out in the middle of the night feeling this way, but if Ghost found a food source, he couldn't let it go to waste, although he should have alerted others. If the prey was large enough, he would be struggling to bring it back, even with Ghost's help.

The Direwolf's howls were louder now, as Jon made his way through the forest. The trees loomed and swayed over him, creating shadows against the moonlight, toying with his sight. He narrowed his eyes, trying to focus, but sweat was forming on his brow, even as an icy breeze drifted his hair in all directions. The shadows seemed to dance around him, soft yet taunting forms, molding into bodies of lives lost against the sky. His heart pounded unforgivingly in his chest as the sound of his horse's breathing cut through the stillness of the night.

He came upon Ghost sooner than he expected; his horse reared up and snorted when he came into view, standing proudly next to his kill; a massive bear, the throat savagely torn open and bleeding. He was shocked; he hadn't seen a bear in months. Struggling to dismount, he tumbled over to a whining Ghost, reaching down to affectionately pat him under his bloodied muzzle. Ghost was going to eat well, too.

Opting for the dagger in his belt rather than his sword, Jon grabbed the bag. The wind blew his curls in his face and they were damp; he brushed them back, looking up into the sky, beyond the tree branches. The shadows drew in closer to mock him and soothe him simultaneously.
You know nothing, Jon Snow. We should have never left the cave. Ygritte. She floated around the twigs, her wild red hair steaming about, her face a blur. You are a Targaryen, commanded the silver-haired Queen, bidding him to see himself for who he was. I see you, you and your sister, the Red Witch drawled. She laughed without sound as if she knew his hidden desires. I will fight with you and die with you, you cannot stop me. Arya loomed over him the nearest, her hair long, dark hair a mass of tentacles reaching out to him. Touching his face, heating his skin, sensuously painting his flesh. No, that was his hair. Wasn’t it? No, it was Arya, he took in her scent around him-

Ghost growled and her image faded away, carrying with it something sweet and breathy, a faint whisper of a murmured dream, so sweet and soothing yet wild and damning against his core; he felt fire in him, consuming him. Was this how the Red Witch felt when Arya’s fire licked her limbs? Was this feeling alive? Dead?

Another growl and howl and another, more ferocious sound emitted from the dark, low and deep. A bear. Another bear—and he could see it then, bigger than the first kill, yet the full-grown direwolf attacked without hesitation. His body moved faster than his mind as he dropped the dagger to unsheathed Longclaw, sure and steady and familiar in his grasp, the Valaryian steel reflecting off of the moonlight, and suddenly he was alive, this is what he was trained for, a fight. He was tired of fighting yet it coursed through his veins as he attacked the beast alongside Ghost. His prey stood no chance against two seasoned killers and went down with little preamble, the wolf greedily going for the jugular while Jon’s sword pierced its heart. A quick death, an assurance of decent eating for a few days now. He withdrew the sword and immediately dropped it. A greenboy’s mistake, dropping a weapon.

Meaning to lean down to pick it up, his legs buckled under him instead and he fell down into the soft, cooling snow, seemingly melting against his exposed cheek. It felt good, for a moment. It almost felt like death without the stab wounds. He knew death. Twice. Death was cold. Yet this was not death. Not this fire in his blood. His whole body boiled with it. He knew. He always knew. Now it was consuming him in this instant and he embraced it.

He meant to call Ghost to him, but either he couldn't hear his own voice or Ghost knew something was wrong and the wolf was by his side, his tongue licking the side of his face that was left exposed. Jon grimaced. He smelled of blood. Jon had had enough of the smell of blood to last a lifetime. Or two. Or three. He wanted the sweet scent of cherry blossoms and earth to assail him, not the fresh kill of an animal.

"Arya," he whispered, reaching up to grasp warm fur. "Ghost, bring Arya to me."

With a whine and a snort, Ghost ran, and Jon saw nothing.

********

The Godswood is beautiful in spring. He sits under the Weirwood tree, back up against the pale bark. It is warm and he is sweating. Above him, red leaves sway gently in the soft breeze, one occasionally falling and drifting down into the dark water in the pool in front of him, creating a ripple. Another ripple forms, made by a delicate, thin finger touching the surface. The breeze blows the scent of red cherries and the good of the earth into his nostrils and he inhales deeply before it can escape him. He wants to close his eyes to savor the feeling but instead he gazes at the girl before him. Only she is not a girl, she is a woman grown, her breasts slight but raised against her fabric, her hips no longer straight but curved. Her dirt-tinged shift is now a flowing, delicate gown; her ratty, unkempt braids now long, smooth dark hair falling around her matured face. She beckons to him, entreats him, and he feels the pull towards her knowing it is pointless to resist any longer.
Hands are on him now, quick and frantic, pulling at his tunic and breeches, yet it is not a lover's touch, and there are too many hands. He tries to concentrate on the slender, cool ones, his flesh coming alive wherever they landed, the ones holding the only magic left in this dull existence. Carrying, they were all carrying him to the water. He refused to move to touch the waters so he was brought to it. He smelled sweat now, sweat and blood and man, he smelled man, and whimpered at the loss of the distinctly feminine scent, where was she, where had she gone. He was naked, naked oh gods he hoped she did not look upon him, on his mangled, ugly, scarred body, yet there was no time for thought as he was submerged into the water, only it wasn't water, it was snow. The shock swept through him and he flailed about but it was futile. No, no, he wanted the fire. He needed the burning.

How long did it last, how long? For a moment it was cool, he should embrace it, he was of the North, he had been a Watcher on the Wall, he breathed the cold as a summer air, it was in his blood, but so was the warmth, so was the fire, both were in his blood, intermixing, boiling and freezing, the boiling was winning, claiming victory in the war on his body.

You know nothing, Jon Snow. He knew he had loved her once and she was gone. He knew love under furs, like the furs he laid on now; he was lying on furs but Ygritte was not there. She was gone, he chose duty over her love. Duty was the ice cold snow melting over his body into the furs, duty was his passionless marriage, duty was the thorn in his side. Passion was this heat, this fight in his head, this ache in his heart, taking root and bursting into life.

"Jon? Can you hear me?" A trembling voice reached out to him then. "Please, please come back to me. I can't lose you, too."

She sounded so far away, beyond the Godswood. She was so far from Winterfell now, far into the stretch of Braavos, she was Faceless and she was beautiful without a name and she was lost to him, a stealthy stranger of mystery. He wanted to respond but the darkness overwhelmed him, the furs enveloping his body, soaking up the cool water in front of the Weirwood, and a soft touch to his chest threatened to unman him, and for the first time in his life he willed himself to surrender to it without provocation.
Broken

Arya's heart beat furiously against her chest as Lady Brienne and Tormund carried Jon clumsily in to the castle as quietly as humanly possible. Not that there were many people left within the walls, but even so, it would alert and alarm the ones that were here, and it would do no good to have the gossip spreading tales of the King In The North's grave illness.

She knew it was grave the instant she saw him, of course, as a whining Ghost led them to a black heap against the snow, shaking yet silent, glowing in the moonlight. Terror ripped at the very fiber of her being, and Arya Stark, Lady of Winterfell and of The Faceless Men, was not afraid of anything. It was the same panic and helplessness she felt on the battleground in the final war when she could see from a distance Jon being dealt a fatal blow from The Night King, even as the Night King fell at the blade of Lightbringer. The Red Woman had still been alive then and Arya only momentarily had spared her life, suspending her list completion until after the war was won and Jon had been granted a third life. Where the Dragon Queen had been engulfed in flames after her death and could not be resurrected, Jon's mortal wound was able to be overcome. Although relieved at Jon's revival, she could still not excuse Melissandre her many crimes and coldly put her to death anyway, yet the Red Woman understood it was a just punishment for the all the lives she had taken - or attempted to take.

He looked very much like the dead man on the battlefield yet without the blood and drama. Not like this, she had thought. Not like this. He did not deserve a solitary death in the snow, gripped by a fever illness, lying in the cold. She had no hesitation and she fell over him, trying to gather him into her arms while Ghost assisted her, nudging and pushing his massive weight up against his master. She filled with dread and relief at the same time; he was alive, at least, his breathing shallow, but she could smell the sweat rolling off of him even as he shook. It was the heat that scared her. She remembered the fever illness that gripped the North just before the Great War, and how it claimed her sister so quickly. But Sansa wasn't a strong fighter like Jon. Jon would fight this to the end and overcome. Wouldn't he?

She had her doubts.

Once he was placed in his bed in his solar, Arya demanded that Brienne and Tormund fetch a tub and fill it with snow and bring it with haste. The fire in his hearth had gone out and Arya made no move to ignite it. Ghost padded over to the side of the bed, lying down with his head on his paws with a whine. Arya knelt on the bed, leaning in. She hesitated only a moment before tugging at his boots and breeches. It was hard to start undressing him; he was heavier than she thought, or else she had grown weaker. It wasn't as if she hadn't handled undressing dead weight before. Her time in Braavos seemed a thousand years ago...

Her hands froze when she pulled off his tunic and undershirt.

She had never seen his scars before, bright and angry against his glistening pale skin. There were so many of them. The poorly-lit tapers flickered shadows across his muscles, defining and then blurring his lines. She left his smallclothes on below the waist for modesty's sake but the rest of his body was exposed, and wet from sweat. His chest heaved rapidly but his eyes remained closed, his dark, curled hair spread out across the pillow as delicately as if he had arranged it. He looked both vulnerable and god-like; a mangled, scarred legend in the throes of a death-grasp. Fear and a small uneasiness gripped her and she felt heat rising within her. It didn't seem quite right to stand by the bed and take in Jon's body like she was. Yet she was mesmerized by him. And terrified. Arya was not terrified of anything, not anymore.

The door creaked open and Brienne and Tormound lugged in the cumbersome tub filled with snow.
as she requested, dragging Arya's eyes away from Jon to the both of them. Both had scarves tied around their faces. A precautionary measure, and a smart one. They dropped the tub and looked at her; Brienne shot a glance at Jon and looked down, almost shy and uneasy.

"Milady - Arya, we should let Tormund -" Her muffled voice sounded as if their was a faint warning to it.

"No." She knew what she was going to say before it came out. "I am not leaving just for propriety's sake. Fuck propriety. We need to get him into the tub immediately."

Tormund grunted his reply and thundered over to Jon. He unabashedly yanked off the rest of his smallclothes before Arya could protest and motioned for Brienne to assist. Brienne looked none to pleased at the idea of handling a naked King In The North but she knew the urgency of the situation and she helped him carry Jon over and deposit him in the tub, gently lowering him down as if they were lowering a corpse into a freshly-dug grave. Jon whimpered a bit; a low, moaning sound the seemed oddly sensual until he hit the snow. He seemed to struggle at first and Arya wondered if this was really the correct thing to do as Tormund piled the snow over him. Jon's eyes opened then, darting around frantically before settling on her. She was still frozen by the bed, even more so from his stare. He was looking through her as if he was seeing something - or someone - else.

How long he stared at her she did not know. From the dim light she could see the snow quickly melting around him as he tried to hold onto the sides of the tub. Tormund and Brienne were flanked by his shoulders holding him upright. Jon fainted, his head tilting backwards, exposing his neck to the air like a lover awaiting a kiss there.

"Bring him back to bed," Arya whispered, forcing herself to look away. She smoothed out the blankets and furs for his return. She knew the furs would be warm but they were more absorbent than the blankets as Jon was brought back to bed, naked as his nameday. Taking care not to look, Arya quickly drew the thinnest blanket over his waist. She concentrated on the pair of concerned faces in front of her.

"Leave us. I will take care of him. You two need your rest. If Jon is going to be...unwell for a few days, I'll need you both at your best to handle the daily duties. I've had my share of this fever illness from the last time it spread. I'll be fine. I promise to send for you if I need help. Thank you, please, go."

Wordlessly and surprisingly, they left, with Ghost following, padding along out the door.

Dragging a small wooden stool over to him, Arya sank down on it. She would have stood but even as the water evaporated from Jon's body into the furs, she could still feel the warmth flowing from him. He was shivering but she knew better than to cover him up just yet, knew that this was a crucial time in the sickness and she prayed to the old gods and the new, to the many-faced god, to any god that would listen that he would pass through this phase and live to tell the tale. Her hands knotted tightly in her lap and she stared at him, her throat constricting. One would think he was taking a pleasant nap, if one could ignore the raspy heaving of his chest and his occasional soft moans. Was he dreaming? She thought maybe he was as his brow deepened and a hint of an oddly carnal smirk played on his full, plump lips. She wondered what he was seeing in his fevered mind. That Wildling he was in love with? Sansa on their wedding night?

There was nothing to do now but wait. Wait to see if the heat in him would subside or overcome him. She knew this was the deciding few hours. Usually the fever and illness would take a person within a day or two, depending on the severity of the sickness; if one lasted through that time, their recovery was nearly assured, but of course a relapse was not out of the realm of possibility. Sansa had only lasted a night, but then she had already been weakened from the babe inside her, and Sansa
was not strong like Jon.

Minutes ticked by, maybe it was an hour or two. Arya was losing track of time and she was bleary-eyed. She only knew it was not yet morning. Jon would move weakly in a fitful sleep, sometimes twisting his legs to where the strategically laid blanket would fall and Arya would bolt to cover him back up. One time she was not quick enough and she saw him in his completely naked glory. Of course she had seen naked men before. Of course she had. This was not an unfamiliar sight, but she flushed anyway; she - brazen, aggressive Arya - blushed over a man she had accidentally seen naked when they were very young and it had been nothing to her. Now she felt like the worst kind of voyeur for thinking he was beautiful even below the waist. She had seen far worse.

Maybe she needed to marry Gendry as quickly as she could. Obviously it was past time for her to find a mate. A mate. Oh gods she was acting like she was Nymeria. She always thought she would never wed, never really want to be with a man, at least not for more than a few hours of pleasure. The wars and the aftermath had changed her feelings on that. She wanted to experience love and sex and she wanted to find that level of passion everyone seemed to enjoy. Why shouldn't she? Granted, she didn't need to be married to do that, but as Lady of Winterfell, she was not some vagabond wanderer or a Faceless assassin to be able to come and go as a wild animal. At last she was now mature enough to know what she needed to do out of duty, but she would damn well make sure it was her choice in the end. Gendry. Gendry was a fine choice, wasn't he? Not only was he King, he had been her friend and they shared an easy relationship, not to mention the fact he was handsome and funny and playful, even after the hell they had gone through in the years spent behind them. He was the best kind of man and any lady in the the kingdom would count her blessings to be matched with such a catch. She had no doubt Gendry would be a good husband. He was handsome and kind and good. But -

Arya's head started swimming from her thoughts and the stress of the night. She felt flushed and disregarded it. Flushed was not feverish. There was a difference. She just needed to shift her mind to a different thought -

Her head nodded and she jerked up. Had she dozed? She glanced over at Jon, who was lying on his back, arms straight at his sides. He seemed to be sleeping more peacefully than before, lying supine and still breathing in soft, raspy tones. Unfortunately he still appeared to be sweating. She would need to bring in more snow to dip rags into and spread on his forehead and chest.

Suddenly he stilled. His breathing slowed and his face settled into an expressionless mask. The fear that nagged at Arya jolted like ice through her veins. A flurry of images spun through her head: her first recollection of Jon when she was a mere toddler - he had sneaked some fruit out of the pantry for her; the times he would play knights and ladies with her and they would fight over who would be the knight; his encouragement of her wanting to learn to use a bow and arrow and a sword; the gift of Needle before their departures; his many hugs and smiles, smiles that he rarely showed anyone but her; their reunion at Winterfell, and how he held her so tightly then, crying into her hair and she thought he wouldn't ever let go; his pained, stricken glance at her while he recited his marriage vows in the Godswood; how their eyes met on the battlefield, if only briefly, as if to convey their possible last goodbye without words; oh gods, how could she lose him? After all they have been through, all those years apart, Jon had never been far from her mind. He was her family, he was more than a cousin or brother; he was a kindred spirit, he accepted her for the murderous assassin she was and he loved her for her independence and fierceness and bravery, and sitting here next to him she was neither independent nor brave. She seemed like a scared little girl again, watching on in horror as her father was sentenced to die and she could do nothing but look.

"What do we say to the God of death?" Syrio's voice echoed in her head.
Not today.

Not this way.

She refused to consider this the ending for Jon.

He still did not move. She squinted to focus on his hairless chest, to watch for signs of the rise and fall. She couldn't tell from the damnable, poorly-lit room, so she slid off her stool and stood by the bed, knees grinding into the side as she leaned over to tentatively touch his chest, palm flat over his heart. Thankfully it was still beating a slow thud and his chest raised slightly. It was enough to spread relief through her but he still felt so heated underneath her fingers. An odd feeling seeped through her skin and she couldn't help but trace the line of the scar over his heart. Willing the sensation to leave, she opened her mouth to speak and licked her lips nervously.

"Jon? Can you hear me? Please, please come back to me. I can't lose you, too."

His heartbeat seemingly quickened at her touch and she felt his chest tighten. Reactionary to the touch, that was a good sign, even if he was still in an uneasy sleep. She studied the scars on this upper torso again, drawn to them, skimming her fingers over them one by one. They were a testament to his bravery, a story to the lives he had lived. There would be songs sung about him for centuries to come and the tales would follow generation after generation. Yet he was still only a man, fighting for his life in a shell of muscle and sickness and sweat. As she traced the last marking on his lower abdomen, she drew back in shock when she heard a low, guttural moan escape his cracked lips, and the shock melded into an embarrassed disbelief when she noticed he was becoming hard underneath his threadbare blanket.

She hastily backed away from him then, guilty and uneasy, bumping up against a small side table where a pitcher of water from the Godswood spring sat next to a tall cup. Now that he was making noise and having...reflexes, she had to try to get some fluids in him. Her hands shook as she filled the cup, the fingertips tingling where she had smoothed his flesh. The heat crept up the back of her neck and she tried to will her feelings away, shove them down into the dark recess of her mind somewhere, maybe to parse them out at a later time. For now, the focus had to be on helping Jon. Cautiously she made her way back, perching atop the bed next to him the cup firmly in her left hand and the right one hesitantly touched his face. Gods, he was still burning. After waking him and making him drink, she would have to fetch some snow and rags. For a moment she took in his face, still so handsome even with his scars, his hair sticky and clinging around his jawline, intermingling with his beard. She never really took the time to study his face this intently before.

"Jon?" Her voice sounded so thin. She cleared her throat and started again, more commanding and forceful (at least, she hoped). "Jon, you need to wake up. You need to try to drink. You need water." The Godswood's water was the only kind she trusted.

His eyes moved under his lids, another good sign, and his brows furrowed as if he was tasting something unpleasant.

"Jon?" Her voice sounded so thin. She cleared her throat and started again, more commanding and forceful (at least, she hoped). "Jon, you need to wake up. You need to try to drink. You need water."

Before she could blink, he bolted up, grabbing her wrist so tightly she let out a small cry as her other hand dropped the cup, which clanked against the floor and rolled. Anger flashed through her body until she looked at him. He looked her straight at her but his eyes were blank, glazed, unseeing. She realized he was in the full thrall of the fever and did not see her. He did not see anything. His lips
parted as if to speak but nothing came out besides a strangled growl, *almost wolf-like*. She tried to wrench free but he was bigger, stronger, and more formidable in his current state than she had ever been in her life. He was close, so close to her that she could feel his heat transferring into her, through her, and it seemed all of her pores opened, receptive to the intrusion. Her body was welcoming the fire and she was aware of the warmth between her legs and the tip of her breasts as well and she became confused.

"Jon, Jon, can you hear me?" She could hear his breathing quickening to short pants. and she could feel his warm breath on her face, but there was still the empty void in his eyes. He at least released her wrist, and she cupped both hands around his face, her right wrist smarting. His beard was slick and smooth. "It's - it's me, Arya. Wake up, Jon. *Please,* please."

Her last please came out as a whisper. She felt drained, lethargic, lost. The pit of her stomach was churning and she meant to get up, retrieve the cup, and return to him to try the water again but the intention fell by the wayside when she felt him seize her by both arms and drag her down onto her back on the bed, twisting his body so that he was above her, a mess of tangled limbs. She barely had time to protest and pushing at him was futile; all she knew were burning hands that pushed her skirts up and then tore off her smallclothes. The ripping was deafening in her ears but there was no chance for panic when she felt a calloused hand shoving between her legs, fingers touching her where no one has before, not even herself. The feeling - *oh gods this wasn't right* - the way he was furiously moving his fingers up and down, the sensation made her gasp. She shouldn't be letting him do this. She had heard stories of men at the height of the fever madness being overcome with emotions and actions that were not of their own volition. She just didn't think Jon was capable - *yet here she was, pinned under him* - and his knee wrenched her trembling legs further apart.

"Stop, Jon, *stop.* It's *Arya!*" Her statement received no more than another growl as he buried his face into her neck, sinking his teeth in. She was wanted to yelp, but managed only a whimper as the pain and pleasure of his teeth and hand overwhelmed her, and she tensed when she felt his finger enter her and there was a wetness there, *was she sweating down there?* No, no, that was the wetness like she had when Gendry kissed her - yes, Gendry made her feel something like this, didn't he? But it wasn't this fire, yes, the fever.

Jon's body covered her in a blanket of fire, sweat and fire, and before she quite knew what was happening, the fire burned inside her more painfully when he withdrew his finger and replaced it with his cock, pushing inside, making her moan in shock and pain and something more. *Yes, something more...*it was flooding her senses as he started rutting her like a mindless animal, his hands snaking up to grip her head, entwine into her hair. All she could do was wrap her legs around him - no easy feat with as slippery from sweat as they were - and cling to his muscled back, digging in her nails in protest at this brutal intrusion, to which Jon seemed to have no reaction, as caught up as he was in his own mad lust. She could no more push him off than she could stop her own response of raising her hips to him in an attempt to meet his hammering thrusts. *Any* woman would do for him, he did not know, he did not *see* her or *know* her, not really. Through the pain there was another sensation and she bit her lower lip, maybe it was shame she felt, shame and awe and yes, maybe *pleasure*. Her legs were shaking and she threw her head back into the pillow, feeling Jon's teeth at her neck, still on her jugular, maybe he was drawing blood, but what did it matter -

"*Arya. Arry.*" She heard her name hoarse on his lips, even as he bit into her. "*Arry.*" His voice sounded sensual and sent wild sensations straight down to between her legs.

"*Jon.*" It came out labored, desperate, breathless. "Come back to me."

His hands clenched harder in her hair, dampening it with his sweat. All she could do was hold on for dear life as his thrusts became even deeper, and she bit her tongue to keep from screaming. She felt
so full, and sore, and euphoric -

"Arya, Arry, mine, mine, Arry -" His voice grew louder, his growls deeper, and suddenly she felt him still against her and there were pulsations inside her. He spilled in her. Spilled his seed and - oh gods- there were no longer any ingredients growing to make moon tea. He collapsed against her, gasping for air just as she was, his cock still buried deep in her tender flesh. She retracted her nails from his back and let her arms fall to her sides while unwinding her legs from his waist. She felt his teeth release their hold and his hands left her hair as his head dropped to lie heavy on her chest. He had her pinned down still so she made no move, even as she felt his seed leaking out of her and onto the furs. Her skirt was still bunched around her waist.

Before she could think on it more, she reached down to feel his forehead, pushing his curls out of the way. He felt more clammy than fiery, and the sweat was no longer running.

*The fever sickness had broken.*

Outside, she heard two distinct Direwolf howls.
Remembrance And Remorse

Fur touched his chest, not the feeling of smooth flesh. He stretched his arms out to find nothing warm and inviting next to him, no sweet scent. There was only softness he could find was from the pillow. Moaning, he flipped onto his back, his neck craning to the side.

Long, dark hair set in a pale face with dark eyes loomed over him, blurred in his vision as Jon forced his eyes past the crusty sleep surrounding them. His hands hastily reached up to wipe them to sharpen the view. His body felt cool against the furs and he realized he was naked under the thin blanket and he clumsily rearranged it to make sure he was covered. He heard Ghost whining appreciatively and felt his wet nose nudging his shoulder before retiring back to the pile of furs near the foot of the bed.

"Just lie back, M'Lord. You've been through a spell, no sense in overdoing it."

Disappointment flooded him when his eyes gained focused and settled on Satin, his squire from The Night's Watch and now serving him as King In The North. Still a beautiful man, he had no scars, no damages to him and he was as soft as a girl with big dark eyes and long, curly dark hair. He was the only one more skilled than Arya at a crossbow, and proved his mettle in the Great War. Jon had made him a knight but Satin, although respectful, said he only wished to remain as his steward, and had no more ambition than that. He was standing by the bed.

"Arya -" Her name was thick on his tongue.

" I'm not sure, really. I have been here since daybreak to keep an eye on your recovery, M'Lord. Lady Stark is no doubt in the Great Hall, attending to scrolls and preparing for you to break your fast. You must be famished."

Jon sat up slowly, shivering, the blanket pooling around his waist. His body felt weak and sore, he smelled of dried sweat, and his head felt as if it was stuffed with wool. There indeed was a hunger deep in his belly, but it was not a craving for food.

"Where are my -"

"Clothes? Here, I have them. Let me help you dress."

Childlike, Jon scooted to the edge of the bed, dragging his blanket with him, and was ready to submit to his steward when he felt a harsh stinging on his back. It felt like fire.

"Ah, Satin, my- my back." He crouched forward and Satin looked over and down his shoulder, gasping perhaps a bit too dramatically.

"M'Lord, you...did you fight something in the woods where Lady Arya and Lady Brienne found you?"

Jon thought for a moment. The bear. Only the bear and the bear did not strike him. He struggled, recalling the woods. Ghost found a bear. There was another. He has been feeling warm, feverish, out of sorts, sick, not himself - and he slipped into a myriad of dreams, hallucinations? His mind frantically searched for the missing pieces. Real or imagined figures? The shadows. Imagined and real. Real. Arya in the Godswood? Oh gods. His heart dropped. Some dreams were not dreams. Something unbidden blazed across his mind. He brought a trembling hand to his nose and inhaled deeply, his tongue flicking the fingertip, and somewhere a low growl emitted from his throat even as his mind jolted in horror.
Satin was waiting with his smallclothes and hesitated when he heard him, his eyes widening at the sight. Jon fist ed his hands to his side and shook his head. Clear. He needed to clear out the shadows.

"Mirrors, Satin. I want to see." No sooner were the words jumbled out of this mouth, his steward dropped the clothes with a short nod and scrambled around for two hand-held mirrors, then left the solar. Of course Jon had no mirrors in his room.

Maybe he didn't want to see, didn't want to know. Bile rose in his throat even as a sensuous warmth flooded him, different from the fever of the night. Maybe I want to see, maybe I want to know. I want to feel. I can taste her on my finger. It was real, I know it was real. Oh gods, Arya, what have I done. What have I done to you. To us.

He glanced over at the middle of the bed, shame flooded him as his memory sharpened, bringing splinters into the folds of his mind. He could recall her scent, he had a dream of a touch on his skin, a lover's caress igniting his dormant desires. Her touch. He had been dead for so long, numb to anything but the fight, the battles. His fever made him alive. She made him alive. Closing his eyes he could feel it, no, yes, he could feel him crushing down on her, oh gods he forced himself on her! On his sister. Cousin. Arya. He suddenly remembered pushing his way inside her to relieve himself of some maddening need, something potent and uncontrollable, he remembered - the tightness and the warmth - he spilled inside of her. He fucked her without a thought in his head except for his own want and lust. Even as he realized it, he felt himself growing hard underneath the blanket. Gods.

Flinging the blanket from him he looked down at his unrepentant cock and choked back a cry. There was an unmistakable light red secretion dried around his shaft. It didn't take long for the realization to hit him and it struck straight to his heart.

Fuck no, no, no. Not this. No, not this. I am a monster. I am truly a monster, no better than a Ramsay or Roose Bolton. I am a raper, just like the ones that came to the Wall. I took her maidenhead without thought to her. I took her maidenhead. Oh gods. I hurt her. I hurt her, I love her and I hurt her -

He tried swallowing the bile in his throat but it stubbornly inched its way up; he slid off the bed and stumbled over to the washbasin, set up in the corner of the room. There wasn't much in him as he retched, one shaking hand clutching the basin and the other shoving his hair out of the way. All the while his back burned while the rest of him shook with the cold. Arya.

"M'Lord!" Satin rushed over, snatching up a cloth hung over the tub on the way, deftly handing it over and reaching out to steady him, still holding the requested mirrors and leading him stark naked back to bed. Jon hurriedly grabbed up the smallclothes and slide them over his legs. He did not want Satin to see his cock, and it had nothing to do with modesty; it wasn't as if the man had never seen him nude before.

"Here, if your hands are steady enough." Satin placed a mirror in his hands; it was cool against his skin and he held it, shaking slightly as he raised it to reflect the one Satin angled behind him. He saw, as he knew he would, eight straight thin lines, red and angry. He knew those were not made in passion. Ygritte never did that when he was inside her. Never.

He handed the mirror back and submitted to Satin's expert hands dressing him. He really couldn't concentrate enough to help much as felt his undershirt and tunic and breeches slip on, except for a passing gratefulness. He did fumble with the laces on his breeches and then sat still as Satin slipped on his boots, stood up, and swept his hair back in a tie. "You should have had a bath first, but it can wait, I suppose," he heard him say, but it sounded so far away. "Are you well enough or would you like me to escort you?"
"I'll manage on my own, thank you. I just need a moment or two, please."

Thankfully Satin heeded his words and left him alone.

Alone with his heavy heart and tortured thoughts.

*I need to make this right. I need to make sure she is all right. Of course she's not. She can't be. How can I make it right. How do I even start the conversation? Good morning, Arya, how are you feeling after I rutted you like a beast last night after you saved my life? She would shove Needle straight through my stomach and I honestly can't blame her if she did so. Better that she aim for my heart and be done with it. I deserved nothing less. My sister, my cousin, the only woman in this world I love and trust completely with my life. I've destroyed it, I've ruined us. I cannot excuse it as a reaction to the fever-sickness; to do so would be craven. In my dreams I wanted her and in reality my body took her.*

For all their distance, for all their awkwardness since their reunion, Jon knew Arya was his strength. She had never been far from his thoughts while at the Wall. He was willing to risk everything for her, even now. He admitted to himself; if he had not felt compelled to marry Sansa for various reasons, none having to do with love, he would have offered Arya the choice to be his Queen. He was sure it would have been met with disgust and a refusal. To her he was still a brother, and nothing more. And now this; this -thing- that happened, he needed to repair the damage, somehow. Words have never been his strong suit; he could make battle plans, discuss matters of coin and household, but when it came to women he was at a loss. He never did have Robb's or Theon's way of talking to girls. Now, the delicate thread of the most important relationship to him depended on what he would say and do in that Great Hall minutes from now.

Reluctantly he stood up, commanding Ghost to stay, and made his way out of his solar slowly, steadily. He was dizzy, not just from the lack of nourishment but from anticipation. The memory crashed over him, his hands in her hair, his teeth sinking into her salty neck, the feel of her body thrusting up against him as he buried himself inside her, crying out her name, and the bliss at knowing she was his completely in the moment. Yes, he remembered...and hated himself for the desire that crept through his body.

Pausing for only a moment, he drew in his breath and opened the doors.

Relief flooded him and he was ashamed of himself; she was not seated at the table, only Brienne and Tormund, finishing their meal. They stood immediately and he waved them on to sit as he sank into his own chair. There was a bowl of soup and ale waiting for him. He had no appetite.

"It's good to see the fever can't keep a dead man down, " Tormund joked, his low voice echoing in the hall. "Good to see you on your feet."

"Thanks, my friend. Where's Arya? I would like to see her."

Brienne cleared her throat before looking at him, her eyebrows shooting up.

"Did she not speak with you?"

"I have not seen her since I took ill. What is it? Has she caught the fever?" Panic struck him. Another thing he would never forgive himself for...

Tormund and Brienne exchanged looks and Brienne cleared her throat again, jerking her chin up but looking down as she spoke softly and not unkindly.

"Arya left for Storm's End this morning. She took Podrick with her so she's not traveling alone. She
said she conversed with you earlier, to let you know her decision."

"Decision?" Jon froze, his nervousness at seeing her suddenly replaced by a dread..and a strange
anger was emerging. *Arya had not been to see him.* He would have remembered it.

"She sent a raven yesterday to Storm's End. She announced her acceptance to become King Gendry
Baratheon's wife and Queen. We thought you knew."

Jon heard a crashing and splintering of his chair and the table overturned to the floor, then emitted a
raging howl before he saw nothing but darkness again. *No. No. She's mine, not his,* screamed the
new voice in his head. She was gone, from his dreams and from his life. There was nothing but
black.
"We finally made it, Milady."

Podrick Payne's voice attempted a jovial tone as they approached the formidable Storm's End castle. It was a single massive structure, sturdy to withstand any fierce storm that rolled around it, and the wall surrounding it was intimidating. Well protected, the castle loomed in greatness.

Arya made no reply as they urged their horses forward. The only noise surrounding them was the wind. She knew he was exhausted, the same as her.

It had been a long, hard journey, made worse by the brutal pace Arya set, much to Pod's delicate protests. She was in her element when traveling; she had done it so much in the past it didn't bother her. Pod had been objecting to various things along the way; where they slept, the food they ate, the roads they took, and the fact that a Lady should have more than one traveling companion. He still tried to remain in high spirits and Arya was thankful for his company overall. He was a thoughtful, respectful conversationalist and she could understand why Lady Brienne kept him as her squire, even as Jon meant to elevate him. He also fought bravely in the Great War, and owed much to Brienne's training. He was rather handsome, almost as good-looking as Gendry with his pursed lips and dark eyes and hair. He was quite popular with the ladies even as shy as he was around them all. He was not shy around Arya, however, and they sparred occasionally as a way to keep their fighting skills sharp, when Jon was not available, even though she was often annoyed at the fact that he was too cautious with her and let her win. At least Jon never let her off easy.

One thing was for certain; the Long Winter was at an end. They came across more melting snow the closer they got, and it was reassuring to the both of them. Samwell Tarly was correct in his declaration, and at every inn and village, Arya could see the relief and hope on everyone's faces. The winds had subsided most of the way, but nearing Storm's Landing they picked up again, albeit as a slightly less chilly bite. She shivered but knew it was not from the harsh breeze. It was from the sheer guilt of her actions.

She made sure Jon was past the dangers of his sickness and slipped out of his rooms once he had fallen into a deep sleep. A part of her wanted to stay with him, comfort him, but the other part cringed at the idea of him awakening and knowing -or not knowing -what they did in the midst of his delirium. She couldn't face her own feelings over it let alone having to bear his horror if he knew. Ghost followed her along the corridor to her solar, whining and nudging at her to return to Jon's room, but she gently hugged him before entering her own chambers to write a message by flickering light, assenting to become Gendry's Queen and notifying him of her arrival to Storm's Landing.

Sending the raven off in haste was the easy part. Announcing her decision in the Great Hall in front of everyone was harder. Yet she would brook no opinions on the matter, or any questioning over her departure. Brienne had started to protest but thought better of it; she knew it would be fruitless, and instead offered Podrick as a guard and companion while she stayed on to ensure Jon's full recovery. Arya had sat uncomfortably making her announcement, shoving her braided hair down around her neck to hide the mark Jon had left her.
While preparing to leave she had stopped to gaze into the mirror in her solar, something Arya rarely did. She was not concerned with looks as Sansa had been, and didn't have a vain bone in her body, but she gave pause to her reflection when she had passed to pack her bag. Her eyes were large in her pale, the dark circles prominent from lack of sleep. She had a long, thin neck, and her body was slim, petite, yet toned under her wool dress. Jon's bite mark had turned her skin shades of purple and red where he had sunk in. It ached. It ached almost as much as her heart as she went about her business, trading her gown for more sensible riding breeches. She would of course take a gown to change into at her last stop before Storm's End.

All the while she thought of Jon.

Even now she thought of Jon, even now as she was closer to her friend and soon-to-be husband. She wondered if he would be upset with her leaving so soon. Or maybe he would be relieved knowing she finally made a decision and was gone. Sadly, she didn't know him well enough to gauge his reactions. He was still so very much a stranger, a stranger inhabiting an older Jon's body, speaking with Jon's voice, no longer a green boy but a man that she did not understand. Sometimes their old compatibility shined through, the ease of just being around each other and not having to chatter senselessly. They were at their most familiar when they were sparring; that was when they came alive. So much alike, coming alive for the fight, yet the difference between them was that she had killed for vengeance, and he killed to save the world. Yet he knew what she was and left judgment on her up to the gods -

She broke from her thoughts as the gates were opened and their horses plodded in. A heaving rose in her chest as guards galloped ahead of them announcing their arrival. Her furs seemed overwhelmingly hot and for a moment she feared she had caught the fever sickness. Her stomach was in knots and she embraced her paranoia. She needed to speak with Gendry alone, and tell him there might possibly be a babe growing inside her. Would he still marry her? Unbidden, she recalled how Jon felt inside her: hot and thick and searing, a pain not so unpleasant as she felt something more than the ache, and she remembered how she felt when he held her to him. It was as if he was still inside her, as if he still held her. Even through the cold she felt the heat. She couldn't dwell on it, shouldn't dwell on it.

Dismounting, she looked over at Podrick, who gave her one of his lopsided smiles and a short bow. She opened her mouth to say something to him but became distracted when she head a booming, soothing voice.

"Milady Arya of House Stark. Lady of Winterfell!"

Gendry rushed her, flanked by the Hand of the King Ser Davos, and the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, Ser Jaime Lannister. Arya tensed a bit. Although Jaime had redeemed himself by killing Cersei to prevent further destruction, and fought brilliantly in the Great War, uniting the Lannister army with Dany and Jon's forces, he still was the one who pushed Bran out of the window and really set all events into motion. Bran's death ensured Winterfell did not fall, and yet Jaime Lannister lived. His golden hair was nearly all grey now, but he was still as handsome as ever and seemingly unaffected by all he's done and seen. Arya knew better than that but she still bore resentment in her heart for the man. Brienne was far too good for like likes of him. Davos, on the other hand, had won Arya's respect and reverence, and she genuinely liked the Onion Knight - turned - Hand. Because of him, Jon was alive. To Arya, that was all that mattered.

The casual way Gendry gathered her into his arms for a hug and twirled her around made Arya smile in spite of herself. He may be King now, but he was still very much at heart still the blacksmith apprentice in Fleabottom. He surely had the arms for it. Even through his cloak and clothing she could feel the muscles flexing.
"Gendry, please!" Feet met cobblestone as Gendry set her down as if she was made of glass. "You would think I've been gone a hundred years."

"Aye, I believe you have been gone so long as that, Milady. You cannot believe how much of a happy man you have made me. Thank you, Lady Arya." He made a grand bow before snatching up her hand to bring to his lips. Of course she could not feel the touch through her gloves, so lightly he did it, but his bright blue eyes sparkled mischievously. Arya's heart jumped in her throat as he smiled wickedly and the sun seemed to dance behind his mop of black hair.

She yanked her hand away.

"Stop it, Gendry. Just call me Arya." She felt nervous and was at a loss for words as she saw Jaime smirk and Ser Davos cleared his throat.

"Welcome home, Lady Arya." Ser Davos spoke formally, his deep, thickly-accented voice calming her. "We've readied your solar and there will be a hot bath for you. I'm sure after traveling so far you are weary."

"Yes, yes I am," Arya smiled her thanks, taking advantage of the offer. "I would very much like to rest and have a bath, but...my King, I would beg a private audience with you."

How would she ever make a decent Queen? She hated sounding so formal...

Gendry's laughter broke her uneasiness.

"My future Queen and wife wishes a private audience? Are you so eager for our wedding that you would just like to move on to the more interesting parts?"

Stop it, Gen." She allowed herself to drop the facade of propriety to punch him on the arm. He merely grinned at her and raised a thick eyebrow.

"As Milady commands." Her grasped onto her upper arms through her furs, pulling her close to kiss the top of her head. "You've made me a happy man, Arya. I can think of no other woman worthy of a crown. And of course I will grant you a private audience."

She looked up at him and the wicked smirk came back to his lips.

"Good. I am famished and would love to have a quiet dinner in my solar with you, if that is acceptable?"

"Anything is acceptable, Arya, now that you're here. We have a lot of things to talk about."

She nodded, accepting his offered arm to enter the castle.

She didn't know for sure how he was going to react to her news but she could hazard a guess. He would not care about her loss of her maidenhead. Whereas other Kings from highborn origins might immediately reject her, Gendry grew up in Fleabottom, where a loaf of bread was more prized than a woman's virtue. It might be a different story when she tells him she could possibly be with child. Perhaps she should wait a week or two to see if her moonblood comes, but time was of the essence so she might as well just clear the air now. She refused to deceive him.

She tried to focus on his arm and banish all thoughts of Jon.

All she could see was his naked body, all she could feel was him inside her, and all she could hear in her head were the growls and moans and her name on his lips when he spent inside of her.
Yes, she and Gendry needed to be wed as soon as possible.
Supping with A King

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Arya sat quietly at the table in her solar opposite Gendry, picking at her plate of food. It was slightly better fare than what she had at Winterfell, of course; she was in the King's castle after all, but she had no appetite. The fire flickered beside them in the hearth and the tapers lit the room, giving it a warmth and a glow, and Arya alternated between studying Gendry's animated expressions and looking down at her plate. She listened patiently to his plans of agriculture for the masses and reconstruction in King's Landing now that the Long Winter was over; his worries about his small council; and his desire to give more voice to the common folk in the way the Kingdom was governed. All she could think about as she looked at his chisled profile was that this man, her longtime friend, was more a King now and less the fugitive bastard blacksmith's apprentice. She realized his mind was more intelligent than she had given him credit for in the past, and although she had scoffed at him that his intelligence was merely Ser Davos, Ser Jaime, and Tyrion whispering in his ears, she had to admit that him talking to her now was all Gendry. He was handsome, smiling as he talked of his plans. She supposed he looked much like King Robert had back in his prime; after all, she heard the whispers amongst those old enough to remember him at Gendry's age. Unfortunately, all Arya could remember of King Robert was the fattened, whoring drunkard who left matters of state to his Hand and Council. She tilted her head sideways, trying to imagine Gendry running to fat and chasing whores, and just couldn't stretch her imagination that far. Then again, she was struggling with more than picturing a dead King. As he droned on and on she started drifting her thoughts away while still maintaining a face of interest.

The ability of being Faceless might be gone, but she could still wear a mask. Maybe this was the wrong choice. Maybe I should have stayed at Winterfell and confronted Jon, or at least wait until he was fully recovered to make my decision. I should have talked with him. I love Gendry, he is my dearest friend, one of two people I can fully trust. Our union would quiet the rumblings of the nobles in the North. The last legitimate Stark as Queen would satisfy their disquiet. Just as Jon marrying Sansa, the eldest legitimate Stark, strengthened Jon's claim in the North. Yet, truly, I care nothing for titles and unions, or the idea of becoming a wife and mother. Sansa had cared; it was all Sansa wanted, to be Queen In The North, have babies, and be a wife to someone who was her kind and gentle night.

The thought of Sansa enjoying her nights in Jon's bed made her ill. It wasn't that she hadn't loved her sister - she was family after all, and her sister - but the betrayal cut deep. Sansa gained everything just by being who she was. She was told the marriage was purely political, nothing romantic, yet she was with child seemingly overnight, and it made Arya wonder if perhaps she and Jon had been intimate even before the wedding. At least she didn't need to worry over a possible child any longer; her blood had come upon her suddenly as she was settling into her solar before Gendry arrived to sup with her. She had thoughtfully stuffed her bag with rags just in case it happened on the long journey here, and as she had tucked them into her smallclothes, she had breathed a sigh of relief. It was one thing she didn't need to wait on and one thing she didn't need to discuss with Gendry. Arya never balked at candid talk, but she recoiled at the thought of bringing up bleeding to her friend and husband-to-be, considering the circumstances. She briefly had wondered what it might be like to carry and birth a child, Jon's child, but knew motherhood was not something she craved. Unfortunately she had to reconcile the fact that as Queen she was expected to produce heirs.

Deep inside her the unrest was still there, was always there, the desire to explore the Seven Kingdoms as a vagabond and to be truly free. Free from the vengeance, from the madness, from the
constraints of protocol and customs. She had seen the same restlessness in Jon, the same despair in his eyes, looking like a bear in a trap, tormented and wanting to be free. Jon never wanted to be King In The North, or Lord Paramount, or the Ruler Of The Seven Kingdoms. Jon's ambitions went no further than Lord Commander Of The Night's Watch, and that he walked away from after he had been betrayed by his Brothers. Perhaps he had always wanted to be Lord of Winterfell, but now that he had Winterfell, he seemed to want to leave it behind. Once a warrior, always a warrior. These last few years of peace, something Jon professed to crave so badly, was killing him. He was not meant for a life of Lords and Ladies. And neither was she.

"Arya?" Gendry startled her back into focus. "Are you listening?"

"I think I'm not as hungry as I thought." That was an understatement. "I think I am just tired -"

"You've not heard a word I've said, have you?" He pulled something out of his tunic then, placing it on the table in the space between the plates. "I was sure you would have something to say on it. Here is the proof."

Ashamed that she had completely blocked out his one-sided conversation, Arya picked up the tattered parchment, carefully unfolding it. It was old, flimsy, but the writing was still clear and as she scanned it, she sighed aloud, stunned, not believing what she was reading.

Prince Rhaegar and Lyanna Stark's marriage declaration. Was she seeing true?

"Jon - so Jon - he isn't a bastard after all." It was all she could manage before dropping the document back onto the table. She suddenly felt cold."Where did you find this?"

"Sam at the Citadel. Interesting thing, he sent one to Jon as well. There were three issues of this decree. Everyone knows Aegon Targaryen had taken both of his sisters to wife, polygamy was accepted, so I suppose it wasn't too strange for Rhaegar to marry Lyanna. Considering the circumstances, it was in secret. Robert - my father - was to blame for that. I guess they were in love, after all."

"Wait. Jon has one of these?" Jon as a legitimate heir would have every right to the throne. "Are you sure?"

"Sam said so, and the man does not lie." Gendry spoke evenly, apparently unfettered by the fact he could easily be supplanted with this single piece of parchment. "If this is true, Jon is the true heir. He's welcome to it, really, but I don't see Jon was wanting this."

If Jon had the verification of his legitimacy, why had he not mentioned it? Why would he not make it known? He would have more right to the throne; Gendry was right. He could be King. She knew Gendry wouldn't contest it and he would abdicate and happily live the rest of his days as Lord of Storm's End. Why wouldn't Jon - well, it was obvious why. Jon doesn't want to be King. But that would matter little to the Northern Nobles who detest the fact that Gendry had been legitimized and declared heir to the Dragon Queen's throne. Arya suspected all along that Dany had only done it to spite Jon when he married Sansa, but little did she know Jon had no intention of claiming the throne, bastard nephew or not.

"Gendry, I am no maiden," she blurted. Well, that's not what she meant to say, but it was what came out. She never really did have impeccable timing.

He shot his eyebrows up and a smirk slowly formed; then he chuckled and lounged back in his chair, arms folded across his chest. Arya jutted her chin out defiantly and mimicked his arm-crossing. She didn't know if he was silently assessing her or finding her as amusing as a puppy.
"I didn't think you were still a maiden, Milady. All those years abroad, and you being far past your first flowering. I cannot reproach you on that. I am no maiden, either." He grinned at her. "So, we are even. I guess that will make our wedding night more pleasant. I don't need to worry over hurting you, and you don't need to worry that I won't know what to do with you once you are naked."

Arya snorted. Relieved, amused, and still shocked over Jon's legitimacy, she let herself take comfort in Gendry's soft laugh and the light in his blue eyes. He reacted pretty much how she thought he would. In the back of her mind, panic erupted as she hadn't given too much thought to a wedding night, or beyond. Her mind was not on a wedding but on Jon.

"You sound like Robert Baratheon." She meant to jest but felt no mirth in it.

"Ah, well, my father was well-known for his whoring, but I am no Robert Baratheon." His eyes grew serious and she blinked, taking in his intense gaze. "I promise to be a good husband to you, Arya, and I will not stray from our marriage bed. I'd have no need or desire to. My parents may have been driven by lusts but I swear on my life I will refuse to even entertain the thought. True, I've had a few experiences with women, but once married I will remain faithful."

Arya looked down at her plate and managed a smile. "You'd better, or else I'll take Needle to your manhood," she said softly, if not a bit seductively.

Gendry laughed, sounding much like he did when they met so many years ago; she remembered pushing him down to the ground, remembered him as her first friend away from home and her first crush as well. She recalled her rage at him being taken, her vow to kill the Red Woman when she took him away from her, something she of course made good on. She was compatible with him on every level and she had an ease around him. Even with as harsh and cruel as life has been, Gendry still had a playful nature with her and she fed into it, even if she was annoyed by it as well. She believed his declaration of devotion, because Gendry was as simple and straightforward as the snow that fell in Winterfell.

A genuine affection threaded through her body as she surveyed him, looking well-groomed in his black tunic with golden stags embroidered around the neck and cuffs. He had a strong neck and a solid chest; Jon was more slim and his muscles exuded agility where Gendry's displayed more of a brute strength. Gendry's eyes reflected his enjoyment for life; Jon's dark eyes, so much like her own, told his tale of a haunted life. Yet Gendry had similarities to Jon as well as differences; both couldn't care less if they were a King or not, and both had a place in her affections...

"We can talk more tomorrow, and you are free to sit in on the Council meeting if you choose. It's getting late and I know you had a long journey. You made good time. I am sure poor Pod is already passed out in his guest solar. I'm glad you're back home, Arya. This place is dull without you."

Home.

Winterfell was home. The North was home.

Jon was home.

But Gendry was her family as well.

"Right. Yes. Yes, I am tired, and I wouldn't blame Pod for hating me for the relentless pace I made us set." She shifted in her seat, suddenly self-conscious of the rags between her legs. "Thank you for supping with me."

He rose from his chair and slightly bowed before sauntering over to her side to help her pull her chair
back. It was gentlemanly and formal and Arya hesitated for a moment before rising as well. She needed rest but she knew as soon as she sank into the bed, her mind would not be letting her sleep.

"I'll go ahead and take the plates out," he said, and Arya was going to joke about a King doing a scullery maid's work but abandoned it and reached out to grab his hand instead before he could lean in to take the dishes. He looked at her questioningly and she pulled her to him, pressing herself flush against him. He was tall. She had to tilt her head back to look at him; she barely came to his neck. She felt his warm breath on her face.

"Kiss me."

"Arya?"

"Kiss me, Gendry." It was a command, not a request. She had not kissed him since before the final battle in the Great War. She wanted to know, to see, if it felt like it did in her memory. If Gendry was to be her husband, she wanted to know what he could possibly make her feel.

He hesitated and out of frustration Arya reached up to grab a handful of coal-black hair, yanking on it just right to pull his lips onto hers.

He was warm and tasted like the meat he had just consumed, but as they parted lips together in a shy, awkward, clumsy kiss, Arya felt something. Not heat or fire, no, but something warm and calming. It was something she could work with, and decided she wasn't too adverse to his hands that seemed to be circling her waist before one reached up to cup her cheek. He was a practiced kisser, no doubt as King he had plenty of willing kissing partners -

A knock at the door interrupted them, and Arya pulled away as Gendry huffed his disapproval at the badly-timed intrusion, smiling down at her.

"I am King, I can make them leave," he said huskily, even as he strode to the door to open it. Ser Jaime stood there, a scroll in his hand. Instinctively, Arya crossed over to stand in front of the dinner table, shielding the marriage decree from view.

"From Winterfell, Your Grace," Jaime simply stated, affording a bow in her direction. "Seal intact."

Arya's heart sank. Winterfell. Jon. What if Jon relapsed into the fever sickness again and didn't make it through this time? Guilt and fear flooded her. She could have at least stayed to make sure he recovered fully -

"Tormund Giantsbane," Gendry muttered. Arya did not miss the slight grimace on Jaime's face. Of course he didn't care for him; he moved in on his Lady Brienne. "Interesting. It seems Jon might be arriving here shortly."

"Jon?" Arya's mind jolted and her body froze. "Are you sure?"

Gendry scanned the document slowly.

"According to Tormund, Jon left on his horse at a breakneck speed and has not returned. Lady Brienne had followed him, and he has not heard anything since. He says he figured he was heading for Storm's Landing."

She felt dizzy. She noticed Jaime's face softening when Brienne's name was mentioned. He looked as soft and dreamy as a greenboy dreaming of his first crush. It was the only time Arya has seen him without his serious or sarcastic face.
Gendry looked up and smiled.

"Looks like we are having another guest arriving at any time now? Arya, did you know -"

"No." She turned her back on the two men and scooped up this dishes, gliding over to Gendry to hand them over to him, and then she nodded at Jaime. "So now I wil beg to retire. I'm - I'm- tired and now we will need to prepare for my bro - my cousin's - homecoming."

She knew Gendry wanted to protest, but as usual with him she took control and shooed both of them out of the door, which she promptly shut and bolted before throwing herself face first on the bed. She didn't know if she should laugh, cry, be fearful or guilty. Maybe all?

He knew. She knew he knew. Jon would not be racing toward's Storm's End if he didn't know what had transpired between them during his fever.

"Arya, Arry, mine, mine, Arry -" Jon's desperate, demanding growl-cry echoed in her head.

She swallowed.

She would be getting no sleep tonight.

Jon was coming for her. Jon was coming for her and he was going to demand a confrontation.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter : Jon!
"Where is my sister—where is Lady Stark?"

Jon entered Storm's End with no ceremony and any formalities and geniality were passed over as he dismounted from his steed. Ser Davos embraced him as Ser Jaime afforded him a slight, somewhat mocking bow, and Gendry hugged him like a brother would. Jon stiffened at that but the King paid it no heed, the first words tumbling out of his mouth as he scanned the castle entrance for any sign of Arya. At least the castle walls stopped the terrible winds that had whipped chafed streaks on his face.

He had made the journey alone, something that was considered unheard of for a Lord, but Jon had set off at a breakneck speed and his only words to a shocked Tormund was that he and Brienne were to take charge until his return. Maybe it was questionable to leave his red-headed Wildling friend in charge, as Tormund did not have the intellect of a Northman, but Brienne was highly capable.

The traveling had been hard and he made more frequent stops than he had desired. For one, his horse could not keep a grueling pace, and the closer he rode for Storm's End, the harder the rain fell. With the instant weather change and the temperatures warming, the snow was melting and the further south he went, the rain had started, still cold, and the winds were merciless, causing him to seek shelter more than he cared. He was still not perfectly well from his sickness and the weather threatened to bring on a setback to his recovery. It would be just his luck if he caught the fever illness again, or else pneumonia, and died on his way to set things right with the only woman in this desolate world he loved.

"Lady Arya is in her rooms, Jon. I've sent someone to her to announce your arrival," Gendry said jovially. "I've had the solar next to hers prepared for you. As soon as the gate opened we had someone running to prepare a bath. You look like you need one." He leaned in and sniffed. "You smell like it, too."

Jon made no reply as the they made their way inside, walking in uncomfortable silence. Storm's End was formidable and dry, but Jon didn't care much to be surrounded by water, no matter how solid the walls were.

"I am surprised Lady Brienne didn't accompany you on such a hard travel," Jaime drawled behind him. "I mean, really, a Lord of Winterfell needs adequate protection—"

"Lady Brienne prefers to stay in Winterfell with Tormund Giantsbane," Jon shot back curtly. "I did not come here for an overly long visit. I would say you are more than welcome at Winterfell if you choose to travel." Inwardly he cursed. He did not like Jaime Lannister, and even killing his own sister to save lives and land did not endear him to the one-handed man. He knew—everyone knew—of his affection for Brienne. He just didn't care.

"I see someone is a bit worn."

Jon avoided looking at the King-Queen Slayer as he knew there was a smirk on his face as he made his way to his solar. The bath would do him some good, and he could face Arya clean and clear-minded. He hadn't had a bath since his sickness, if he could even call what was done to him a bath.

He walked into the solar while everyone quietly left him, including the diminutive flaxen-haired servant who drew his bath. He afforded a small smile and she blushed on her way out after she asked if he needed assistance and he shook his head no. It took no time to set aside Longclaw and his bag, along with this clothes. It was warm in the room thanks to the roaring fire and he eased his naked,
tired body into the steaming bath, releasing his hair from its tie so he could wash it thoroughly. The
warmth of the water relaxed him as he realized how sore he really was as he sunk down, relishing
the soothing of his muscles. The soap he used reminded him of Arya, who always somehow smelled
liked the forest and cherries, long after the cherry trees had stopped blooming. He examined the bar,
noticing it was a crudely made block of ordinary soap. Yet, he could smell -

Only the crackling of the fire and the soft splashes filled the room as his thoughts drifted to Arya. At
least she hadn't hastily married Gendry before he had arrived; he half expected that as it sounded like
something she would do. Yet Gendry mentioned nothing of the betrothal so Jon assumed she was
still only Lady of Winterfell. What was the space of time between their arrivals- three days? Of
course the King would want a celebration, a formal wedding, a custom gown for his bride, all that
would take time. However, Gendry was not used to a King’s personal life, or pageantry, and there
seemed little room for frivolities in the world they lived in now, where everything was sparse and
bleak and desolate. With the coming of spring, however, there was a chance for the kingdom to be
reborn and reconstruct finally, and what better way to usher in the new world than a joyous wedding
and a crowning of a Queen, a love-match no less.

A love match. Yes, he knew Arya had a deep affection for Gendry. From nowhere, a low growl
emitted from his chest. As soon as it had emerged it was gone.

He leaned back and closed his eyes. His languid body belied his mind as it raced, trying to decide on
what to say, what to do. It wasn't was if he hadn't gone through every possible scenario over and
over, every word he could utter, every emotion he could feel. He had been prepared to meet her at
the gate with a crowd of unwanted gatherers, Gendry included, and he had steeled himself for the
first time their eyes met, knowing it would set the tone for his visit. He would have begged-
demanded?- a private audience to discuss matters, and in front of the King he knew she would
concede. It was an underhanded ploy, and he was hesitant at first to use it, but then remembered she
left him without so much as a word or note.

The anger was still boiling inside him at the craven betrayal. He never would have thought Arya one
to ever slink off with her tail tucked between her legs, like a cowering wolf.

She's had more than a tail tucked between her legs, his voice sneered.

"Stop," he whispered, squeezing his eyes tighter shut.

Yet it was too late. It haunted him, the feel of her, what he could recall. It was a haze; a memory and
feeling shrouded underneath a thick layer of delirium but he still imagined it, adding in his own past
experiences to fill the gaps. The horror of what he did intermingled with the pleasure of it and he was
both ashamed and aroused. Shame for the way he had taken her, it was shameful and wrong. He was
sure she had no pleasure from it, only pain. She deserved to experience delight, to be treasured. But
he did not know. He did not know. He would carve out his heart out of his chest and hand it to her if
it would absolve him of this guilt, even as his fingers itched to touch her again. To actually feel her.

Mindless bastard, his voice berated him. Raper.

"I'm not a bastard," he whispered back, as his trembling hands gripped the sides of the tub, willing
his emerging erection to go down. It wasn't going anywhere and he hesitated a moment before
moving a hand down into the water, grasping himself, wondering how her hands would feel
caressing him instead -

The door to his solar creaked open and shut.

He forgot to bar the door.
He swiveled around in the tub, sloshing water everywhere to take in his unexpected guest, his hands flying up to push water and hair out of his line of sight.

She stood there, after barring the door, leaning up against it with her hands behind her back. She said nothing but stared at him, and from the distance he could see the fire in her dark grey eyes. Even as her face remained impassive her eyes gave away her emotion. Shock, determination, and something else he couldn't quite place.

"Arya." It came out cracked, hoarse, and he frantically searched for words. "I meant to see you at supper after my bath -" It was a lie. He wanted to see her sooner, alone, but not like this.

"I know. I was told. I wanted to see you before then." She didn't move from the door. It looked as if she was using it as a lifeline. "You did not need to so needlessly come to Storm's End. A raven would have been suffice for any business -"

Her tone was casual and cold but soft. Jon was suddenly aware of the physical difference between them; she was standing, her head high, strong and beautiful, clothed in a thick gown of black, her hair hanging down in a smooth plait; he was sitting low, naked in a tub of his own washed-off grime. Anger sparked in him. She knew he was not here for business.

"You know well this visit is not for any business with the King. Well, it concerns the King but it isn't a business matter."

"Jon-" She faltered, and he saw her swallow hard, her breasts heaving, her mouth set in a determined line. She tried again. "I've accepted Gendry's proposal and I am to become his Queen -"

Jon clutched the sides of the tub and propelled himself up, stepping out of the tub as the water spilled everywhere. Instead of glancing around for his towels he stood facing her, arms to his sides. He was completely exposed to her, his eyes never leaving her face as she brazenly took him in from head to toe. He didn't care that he was still erect, didn't care that she could see all of the marks on his scarred, mangled body. All he cared about was her determination to stay stubborn and avoid what happened. He refused to let her get away with it. Not after everything that had transpired between them.

"Your towels are to your left. Do you need me to hand them to you?" There was a hint of sarcasm in her voice as well as something else that made her tone thick and deep. She moved her arms to circle her waist, and even from where he was he could see she was clutching hard. His instinct was to rush to her, take her in his arms, beg forgiveness from her and then ravish her with kisses and touches to prove his apology. It would no doubt receive a slap and a curse, so he obediently reached for his towels. Only then did she turn around to face the door.

"I can come back when you are ... decent."

"No." It came out sharper than he wanted. "Stay, please. We won't have a chance to talk privately for awhile, and I need to speak to you."

He made quick use of the towels and hastily jumped into his breeches and shirt, lacing up as quickly as he could. It was made more difficult due to the fact his drying was ineffectual and his clothes clung to his wet skin. His shaking hands found his tie to pull back his damp hair from his face.

"You can turn around now, Arya."

She turned, her arms still around her waist as she walked towards him, her eyes large and luminous, seating herself in the nearby chair. He still stood where he had dressed.
"Gendry hasn't made an announcement yet." Her voice trembled but she looked at him."I suspect he will at the feast he's planning later. It has already been agreed upon, Jon. All we need now is a formal declaration, then we will -"

"No." It came out angrily, forcefully. She would never belong to Gendry, if he could help it. Never. Her lush, dark eyebrows shot up at that, challenging him. He elaborated. "No, you are not marrying Gendry. I won't allow it. I forbid it. I am still Lord of Winterfell and I can say -"

"No?" She started to glare at him. "Well, you can tell me no all you want, and I will pay your no as much heed as you did mine when you fucked me."

And there it was.

"Arya, I -"

"No, no, just forget it, Jon! Let's just get this out in the open now. You were out of your mind, you didn't know. You fucked me and yes, I let you. I could have stabbed you in the belly with the small dagger I keep at my waist to get you off of me but I didn't. I could have screamed bloody murder and had guards burst in on us. I could have called for Ghost to come charging through the door. So save me your contrite act and just accept it and move on."

This wasn't the way it was supposed to go. He never imagined any of the scenarios being this way; her words stinging him and throwing all his rehearsed speeches from his mind. He opened his mouth to say something, either in fury or sadness, but she cut him off before he could speak, holding a slender hand up to stop him.

"Yes, we will put that night behind us and move on. I will make a good match with Gendry. The North needs a good match like this to keep the nobles satisfied." She gave a mirthless laugh. "Besides, didn't you do the same? Married to form an alliance, yet you found enough pleasures in the marriage bed to quicken a child instantly. I am sure it will be the same with Gen-"

He rushed to her, yanking her out of her chair by her arms, demanding she look at him. She struggled but looked up at him, her eyes furious.

"It is nothing like what happened with Sansa, I can promise you that. I did what I had to to solidify the North for the Wars. I shared Sansa's bed but never took her body. Never. I comforted her, listened to her, but never did I fuck her. I couldn't. I just couldn't, because she wasn't - she wasn't -"

She stopped struggling but her eyes narrowed in disbelief. He read her mind. Of course she would doubt him.

"The babe was not mine." He never told another soul, but what was it anymore to betray the dead? "Baelish died for more than just his betrayal of the North."

"What- why- why didn't you tell me-" For once, Arya had no snappy comeback or heated retort. He felt her body relax in abject shock.

"I couldn't. I couldn't tell anyone. Sansa would have been killed in her sleep if the nobles ever found out. I had to protect not just our alliance, but the life of our sister and the child as well. It was all for naught. I swear to you on the love I have for you, I did not lie with her as a husband lies with a wife. I held her at night, yes, gave her solace that way, but that was all she needed for happiness."

For the first time ever, he rendered her speechless and her face crumpled, her eyes glistening over with the start of tears. Her reached out to cup her face, trying to be tender even as he choked on his jealousy at the thought of Arya finding pleasure in Gendry's bed.
"It's not the same. Do you love him, Arya? You never answered me at Winterfell and I want an answer now."

She wrenched away from him, her chin jerking up. *Stubborn woman, just as she had always been a stubborn little girl.*

"Yes, I do. *I love him.* I am going to be his Queen."

His heart shattered as she spat out the words, even as he was infuriated with her, with himself. He knew she wasn't lying. She really did love him. He burned.

"Arya, I am so sorry for what happened. I'd give anything to take it back, I would never cause you pain. But I *cannot* let you marry Gendry. I cannot. And you cannot run away from *this-*"

"I've already consented. There is nothing more to discuss." Her mouth trembled as she looked up at him, the tears finally spilling from her eyes. "This is the best thing for the realm."

She moved further away from him turning and walking towards the door, her skirts swishing behind her. "I will see you tonight at the supper."

He stood rooted, watching her reach for the bolt, and his whole body snapped into action as he sprinted to her, light and stealthy, catching her up in his arms from behind, crushing her to him, burying his face down into her hair, her neck. He remembered sinking his teeth into her there but steeled himself from doing it, the desire was there, but he fought against it as he merely let his lips graze her softness there, the taste of her heightening his desperation.

"Don't leave, Arya," he muttered into her neck. It was a demand, not a plead. "Not until you know. Not until you *know* -" He turned her around and there was no hesitation as he pulled her flush to him and bent down to meet her lips with his. He could feel her starting to move to speak a protest but he gave her no time as he parted her lips in a slow but hard, heated kiss, tasting her for the first time. Her mouth was small but warm and inviting, and after a moment she returned his kiss and matched it, allowing him to demand and take more, all the while a steady thread of passion coursing through his body. His tongue found hers and he heard her gasp, so he pulled away from her only to thumb away the wet streaks from the sides of her eyes and look at her before quickly finding her lips again.

*Seven Hells,* she tasted good.

Sweet and soft yet tart and fierce, they kissed over and over until Jon greedily broke away to devour her neck, one hand grasping the nape of her neck and the other roaming over her shoulder, across her breasts. She was warm and full of life, and he needed her. He could feel her hardened nipples through her gown and he heard her soft whimpers - *the sweetest sound he's ever heard* - as he sunk his teeth into her neck, blooming a purple mark there as he sucked in her skin. Instinctively she bucked into him, her hands threading through his damp curls to push him into her. He groaned and he let his hands roam down to her waist and lower, but her skirts were heavy and he didn't know if she could feel his hand when he pressed in to cup her between her legs, feeling even more fabric. *Why were there more layers?* Gods, he hated these gowns. Heated, he reached down to pull her skirts up and he felt her stiffen.

"Jon!" She pushed him away, panting, her breath as labored as his. He stared into her and noticed her cheeks were flushed."I -I can't -"

"You *can.* Arya, *I love you.* I want to please you, to show you how sorry I am for -"

"You can't, Jon, I'm not -well, *not clean* - I -" She bit her lip, looking away. "I'll see you at supper -"
"Ar-?" He tried to make eye contact, trying to understand what she was saying, but she turned away from him, clutching at the bodice of her gown as if he had tried to rip it away from her flesh.

She fled, fumbling with the bolt and slamming the door behind her, leaving him aching and burning and confused, except for one thought howling like a wolf, feeling like the fire of a dragon through his mind.

*She's mine.*
Sparring, Supper, and Surprises

Everything was quiet, too quiet, and Arya stood, her hands on her hips, sighing.

Just over an hour from now she would be supping with Gendry and the rest, including Jon. Arya cursed under her breath, dressed only in her smallclothes, going through her sparse wardrobe laid out over her bed in her solar. She was never good at selecting finery. At Winterfell she was content with her simple wool dresses or basic leather breeches; there was no need or expectation to look the part of an overdone noble. Here, however, at a King's Court, she needed to dress the part of a noblewoman; specifically, a noblewoman who the King had an eye for to marry. It wouldn't be a quandary, really, as she had a few more than appropriate gowns left from the last time she resided at Storm's End, not too long ago, but there was a massive problem in a tiny package that Arya had not counted on.

Rushing to her mirror she sat on the bench and leaned in as close as she could get, shoving her hair aside and panicking once again as her gaze drifted straight towards the mouth-sized dark reddish-purple mark on her pale neck. It stood out like a sore thumb and the longer she stared at it, the bigger it appeared... and the more she still felt Jon's lips and teeth there, spreading warmth through her. She cursed again and then let out a tiny laugh without much mirth attached to it.

She, Lady Arya Stark of Winterfell, one of the Faceless Men, a seasoned fighter, survivor of the Great War, was fretting over how to hide a love bite given to her by her cousin-former-brother so that her friend-turned-King-prospective-husband wouldn't see it. She never would have thought to be in such a predicament. This was better suited to frilly little empty-headed girls tumbling in the hay with greenboys, not tough-as-leather Arya Stark. Frantically, she eyed the baubles on the table, namely the thick necklaces laid out before her that would feasibly cover her problem. She never wore jewelry, seeing no need. Some were Sansa's, and their mother's, and there were a few pieces gifted to her from Gendry. Sansa would have loved to sit and adorn herself to make her look even more stunning, but Arya was no Sansa.

Thinking of Sansa made her shift uncomfortably. She was ashamed at the relief she had felt at Jon's confession, as if somehow she was betraying her dead sister by feeling happiness and satisfaction knowing Jon never had sex with her. She doubted Littlefinger's impregnation of Sansa was consensual, and her heart went out to her sister, thinking of the trauma must have suffered. It seemed like typical Littlefinger; get the Lady of Winterfell with child and marry her himself. It mattered little to her what the reasons were, since he paid the ultimate price for attempting to betray Jon in favor of Queen Cersei. Jon being Jon had truly made the marriage one of not just political sense, but emotional as well. As much grief as Sansa gave him when they were young, he still felt the need to protect his kin, and Arya could not find fault in that. Even now, though, she felt a twinge of jealousy at the image of Sansa finding comfort with Jon at night, even if it wasn't sexual. She had still lain with him through the night and found solace in those arms.

She stared at her reflection, her fingertips lightly touching the reminder of what had happened not an hour before, and she closed her eyes, feeling his lips against her, his hands caressing, and the way he felt as she leaned into his strong, warm body and threaded her fingers through his damp curly hair. Heat had painted her skin and her flesh still felt as if it was burning. She had been so alive, so ready for whatever would happen, and then of course she has to ruin it all by remembering her moon's blood was still upon her. Albeit light and nearly gone, she felt horrified at the thought of him finding her rags between her legs. What would have he have done? Pulled back in disgust? Been embarrassed? She didn't know. She didn't know because she still really did not know Jon post-war. All she knew was he never approached her like that before, never showed anything but the upmost
deference to her since their reunion... aside from his illness, of course. If anything he had been distant and it seemed as if the old connection they shared in their youth had dissolved over the years apart. He was a changed man, and she was a changed girl-turned-woman. She struggled to remember the beloved brother of her youth and the bond they shared. It seemed to be in a another life, someone else's life. The bond was still there but it had changed into something more complex, and finding out about his true parentage was a great part of it. They were no longer forbidden to each other in any capacity, and Arya allowed herself to finally feel something for him on a physical level. Paired with the emotional attachment she always had to him, the feeling was incredibly overwhelming.

And all she could do was tell him she wasn't clean.

"Stupid girl," she muttered at her pale reflection, even as she remembered Jon standing up in the tub in all of his naked glory. She tried to push it away and concentrate on Gendry. Yes, Gendry and his strong hands and arms and empathetic smiles. Gendry and his zest for life that Arya could not understand or feel. Soon to be her husband.

Touching the mark on her neck, she sighed.

The banging at the door startled her. Hastily she unbound her hair from her plait and flipped it forward around her neck. An easy fix for now, but she doubted she could be so fastidious at dinner to keep her hair down and hugging her skin -

Nevermind that she was still in her smallclothes, she padded to the door.

"Who is it?" Her voice was low, strong, and commanding. She could exude confidence even if she didn't feel it. It if was Jon, what was she to do?

"Pod, Milady. It's quite urgent. Please."


he flung the door open and Pod caught his breath, turning away, flustered.

"Uh, forgive me, Milady, I-"

"Oh be quiet. I'm just in my smallclothes. It isn't like I am naked and if I was I wouldn't care. If I wouldn't care, then neither should you," she said shortly. "What it is it?"

Podrick still refused to look a her.

"It's the King, Milady, and Jon -"

Oh gods. The blood drained from her face.

"Well, what? Pod, what -"

"They are fighting in the courtyard in front of the castle. Well, not fighting, it's sparring. I guess Gendry challenged Jon to a friendly match, joked around that Jon was out of practice since it's been a few years since he's seen a battle. Jon -well- he accepted and it started friendly enough, but -"

Scurrying to find her boots and furred cloak (which would hide her neck, thankfully), Arya started to advance towards Needle that was propped up against the wall by the hearth, but thought a more intimidating sword was needed.

"Hand me your sword, Pod," she commanded, extending her hand. She knew Pod's sword was slim
but formidable, and she knew she could wield it fairly easily. Pod hesitated for only a moment and he
unsheathed carefully, gently offering her the hilt as the sword pointed down towards the ground.
Arya grabbed it with a small thanks before setting her jaw in a hard line and storming out of her solar
and down the stairs, into the short hall and out the dual doors, Pod close on her heels, as if the sword
was his girl and he refused to let it out of his sight. Maybe he was worried she might damage it, and
his concern was not unfounded; during sparring one day she ended up putting a tiny nick in it, easily
replaced but Pod had nearly cried.

She heard the shouts of cheers and laughs before she even had the doors opened by the two guards
standing at attention. That was a good sign, at least... but when she stepped out into the small yard
she saw a circle of men formed. Unfortunately all she could see were flashes of steel. She instantly
wished she had Sansa's height, but she had something Sansa never had: a sword, and everyone knew
she knew how to use it.

"Let me through!" She shouted as loud as she could. "Let me through, damn you -"

She looked around for anyone - Davos, Jaime, Bronn, any of the Kingsguard, and found no one.
Podrick ditched in front of her and shoved men brutally aside for Arya to make her way. Once they
saw who was behind them, they stopped shouting and bowed their heads in respect. Arya was well
known throughout the Seven Kingdoms. Men almost twice her size deferred to her, due to her
loyalty to her House, her bravery and fighting skill, her close relationship with the King, and -
perhaps most of all - her number of kills.

Arya stumbled into the center to see Longclaw and a spiked warhammer clash; both Jon and Gendry
had shunned their coats and stood in the misting rain, sparring. Both were clad in tunics and simple
breeches; Jon in dark grey, Gendry in black. Gendry saw her first and offered her a grin of delight,
which distracted him long enough for Jon to shove him down into the wet ground, swooping down
with Longclaw. Gendry snapped back into action with his warhammer and caught the blade on his
weapon, pushing back and attempting to struggle to his feet. Jon did not see Arya; it seemed he was
not seeing anything at all besides his target as he reared back to strike again, his face determined,
blank, serious. Arya had seen that look before, gods help Gendry, Jon was not playfully sparring -

Arya ran in front of Gendry and met Jon's sword with Pod's with a clank while squarely meeting his
gaze. His eyes softened, losing the hard determination in them. Jon was strong, stronger than she
was, but his surprise at her coming to Gendry's rescue caught him off guard and she was able to
retreat from him, nearly tripping over Gendry in the process as Jon backed away, heaving, the wild
look in his eyes subsiding. Gendry laughed, seeing humor in what Arya was perceiving to be a
volatile situation. He did not know how close Jon probably came to trying to hurt him.

"Ah, Lady Arya coming to my rescue! Or have you come to take us on at the same time?" His words
were met with laughter from the crowd and clapping, the obvious dual meaning bringing delight to
the spectators. "I think even working together Jon and I could not keep up with you."

More laughter. Arya was not amused.

Neither was Jon, who glared at Gendry.

"Aye, it seems I needed to come to your rescue. How does it feel for a King to be saved from sure
defeat by one little woman?" She tried to take on a jocular tone, even as she tightened her grip on
Pod's sword. "Besides, are we not all supposed to be supping soon? And you both are out here wet
and dirty and acting like greenboys."

"Ah, well the one little woman is Lady Arya Stark, so it is my extreme pleasure to be saved,"
Gendry smiled. "Any king who would be displeased with you is not fit to be king."
"Where is Ser Davos? Ser Jaimie?" Arya was speaking to Gendry but looking at Jon, who stood immobile, his eyes now calm yet darkened and taking her in. She felt warmth spreading between her legs at his intense stare. She dragged her eyes to Gendry in time to see him shrug and offer up his sexy, nonchalant grin. Damn them both.

"Oh, they are arranging a short council meeting. I doubt anyone will be sober after supper to attend one. I asked Jon to accept a sparring session to pass the time. He's still a very formidable opponent."

"Yes, a formidable opponent who has just recently recovered from the fever illness and rode all the way here in cold rain, and is now standing in a cold rain in a senseless show of some male bullshit." Not very queen-like words, she supposed, but it had the desired affect as she saw Gendry drop the warhammer to his side.

Arya wanted to question his statement about the Council but thought better of it. For a moment she thought of Robert Baratheon, leaving her father to take care of business while he drank and whored...but she pushed it away. Gendry was not his father. He wasn't. Instead of saying anything else to either of them, she turned to make her way past the crowd, handing Pod his sword on her way back to her solar to dress. Her head was high and her gait slow but steady, even as she realized she had been standing around a bunch of men in nothing but her smallclothes and a cloak.

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Supper was turning into a dismal affair, but apparently only Arya and Jon, who sat beside her, had that feeling. Everyone else at this point was rip-roaring drunk and carrying on merrily, as if there was not a care in the word. Even Ser Jaime and Ser Davos seemed more than willing to partake of the strong ale. Arya grimly thought that if they were attacked in the dining hall it would be a short massacre comparable to the Red Wedding. She had only sipped at her drink and Jon as well, drinking only enough to wash down his meal.

There was no announcement of the betrothal to which Arya was surprised. She had been seated with honors beside Jon, facing Gendry and Davos at the opposite end of the long, rectangled-shaped table, with Lords and Ladies of varying ranks on the long sides. Tables were also set up closer to Gendry leaving Ayra and Jon feeling far away from all of the other guests. Music floated around them and occasionally couples would dance around flickering tapers. Arya indulged Gendry a dance under Jon's unwavering gaze, and she forced a gaiety she couldn't feel naturally while trying to ignore Gendry's heated embrace. He had complimented her on her dress, a modest dark grey ensemble with a high collar paired with a gift to her, a thick dark-jeweled necklace high around her neck. He also appreciated her hair, worn long and straight, adorned only by a simple thin band of jewels. She accepted his flattery, as it was genuine, but that was earlier. Now he was as drunk as the rest of them and the revelries were wearing thin. She plotted her escape in her mind even as she smiled and said all the correct things to everyone.

To make matters worse, Jon had not said much to her through the meal. She was acutely aware of his gaze when she was dancing, but other than giving her a brief embrace before sitting next to her, he made no gestures towards her. They were close enough to rub arms yet he kept from touching her even as she could literally feel the tension and heat throughout his whole body. She was sure the admonishment from her outside and the rejection from her in the solar weighed on his mind but he said nothing as he ate heartily from his plate and rested his blank, dead gaze on Gendry. Miserable, Arya picked at her own plate even as her eyes were drawn to Jon's hands clutching his cup so hard she could see the whites of his knuckles. She tried to concentrate on a young lady singing a folk
song, a song of legend about the Prince that was Promised who saved them all in the wake of the Long Night. Her stomach tightened as she saw Jon clench his jaw.

Arya could only take so much. This day was more emotionally exhausting than any battle she had been though. Was this all there was now? Senseless emotional battles replacing the physical ones, love quandaries replacing the struggle to live. She would rather endure another Long Night than go through this torture. At least in avoiding death and fighting for life everything was cut and dried. This was all an uncertain mess and could not be resolved by a strike of a sword. *Even if for a moment the thought flashed in her head to take a sword to every boisterous voice at this supper.*

She suddenly wished she was back at Winterfell. She missed home, the Godswood, her own solar; she missed Nymeria and Ghost, who hadn't followed them (that she knew of), she even missed Brienne and Tormund and Satin. She wanted to visit the crypts again, to feel close to her family. All of her family, aside from Robb and Mother, were down there. Her heart ached as she thought of Robb's fate and her mother's, how their bodies were desecrated, and how close she was to seeing them one last time. So close, but not close enough. Not that there was anything she could have done; she would have died, too.

Suddenly the feeling overwhelmed her and she reached out to grasp Jon's arm. She felt him tense but did not release her hold. He turned to stare at her, questioning, his eyes soft but his brows furrowed as a tiny smile formed.

"Jon." He voice seemed thin. "Jon, I - I miss Winterfell. I'm sorry I ran off like I did. That wasn't me. Not really. I wasn't in the right frame of mind -"

Jon reached over with his other arm and placed his hand over hers, pressing it harder to him, his face full of understanding and intensity as he looked into her eyes. His touch was intimate and to anyone looking perhaps it could be perceived as cousinly or brotherly affection, but Arya knew differently. Or, her body just felt it differently.

"What is done is done, Arya." His fingers lightly caressed her knuckles."I am truly sorry for what happened. There seems little option for you now. Request a private audience with Gendry. He's not made a formal announcement so there would be no embarrassment over a broken agreement between you two. I will back you. The North will back you as well, if anything would come of it."

Arya looked over to Gendry, who was turned away talking to Ser Bronn, and yanked her hand away to grab her ale and down it. It burned her throat but spread a relaxing warmth, calming her nerves. Jon perhaps meant to reassure her but instead his words panicked her more. The nobles never truly accepted Gendry as King, only loosely holding loyalty due to Jon. If it was known Arya refused to marry the King -

"I might talk to Gendry, but it would be to move our betrothal forward. Jon, I cannot rescind the acceptance. I cannot undo it, just as I cannot - I cannot -"

She stood up, a hand flying to her necklace, making sure it was in place where it should be, hiding her moment of weakness, and strode over to where Gendry sat. Once he saw her, he stumbled to his feet and bowed his head.

"I would take my leave now, I am feeling tired, Your Grace," she said clearly. "I will see you in the morning to break our fast. This was lovely, Gendry, but my head is ringing."

Gendry smiled, a slow, sensual smile as he took her pallid hands into his and brought them to his lips for a ceremonial kiss. He looked so handsome in the candlelight, even as he wavered a bit from the drink. Guilt swept over her.
"Well, I wish you a good night, Milady. I was intending to make my way over to you, but now I cannot wait until the morrow."

"Call me Arya, or you won't see me on the morrow," she half-joked.

"Very well. Arry. Pleasant dreams."

It took all of her willpower to saunter out of the hall instead of running full speed. As she made her way out into the hallway and up the steps to her solar, the music and conversations grew muffled and her footsteps quickened. Maybe she shouldn't have drank her strong ale so quickly; it was going straight to her head.

Once inside she immediately sat at her vanity and unclasped her necklace. It felt so restrictive and it was with relief that she placed it away in its proper box, along with her jeweled headband. All she wanted now was to brush out her hair, strip out of her also restrictive dress, and just go to bed. Forget at least for a few hours what a mess she'd made.

What to do now?

Her head hurt as well as her heart. She might as well be honest with herself, even if she didn't want to be. She readily acknowledged how much she cared for Gendry, loved him as part of her family. He was her first crush, her first kiss, and she knew he cared for her.

But she was in love with Jon.

She had always loved him, there was no question in that. They were so close as children, so much alike, and after he left for the Wall and she left for King's Landing, he was never far from her thoughts. Throughout the years she always thought of him, her brother, and even with Gendry she couldn't help but compare the two men. Yet the years apart and Jon's parentage reveal had changed her feelings completely from a sisterly devotion to the desires of a woman for her lover. She fought it, she did, keeping in her head all the memories of him as a brother, but she was losing this battle. It was more than a familial love and she finally gave credence to it, borne out of the feverish night when he took her. Since reuniting with him there has always been an undercurrent and she admitted it now. Now, when it was too late. Her inexplicable jealousy over her sister wasn't because she had obtained security and the title of Queen In the North (albeit briefly), it was because she had Jon for life. Even if that life had been cut short.

She sighed, moving to unbutton the top of her gown. The button were tiny and her hands shook. Her mind was a bit hazy and her bed looked inviting. Maybe tomorrow she would have a better outlook on things. She needed a good night's sleep, and Gendry would no doubt be passed out soon, so the option to talk to him definitely had to wait until morning. Besides, if she had to go through any more emotional turmoil today she would scream.

For the second time today, there was an urgent knock at her solar door. How appropriate, before it was while she was choosing what to wear. Now it was while she was ready to strip the choice off and go back down to her smallcothes. At least this time she wouldn't embarrass anyone by greeting them half-naked. She padded barefoot to the door and unlatched it.

Arya had no time to say a word as Jon rushed in, barring the door and picking her up in one fell swoop and carrying her to the bed. Before she could so much as let out a squeal of surprise or protest he laid her down and his lips found hers in a passionate, bold move that Arya found little resistance to. His lips were warm, strong, and she kissed him back, savoring the feeling of him on top of her, holding her, kissing her. She felt it through her entire body as she reached up to untie his hair and run her fingers through his curls before settling her hands around his neck. He gasped into her mouth -or
was that her- and she drew him in closer. The ale and his kisses were dizzying and she felt as if she was falling down into the bed. She broke away from his demanding lips to catch her breath, her heart hammering in her chest.

"Jon. Jon. What are you doing? What are we doing?" She was afraid to ruin the moment, but she had to know. "This is dangerous. We are in the King’s -"

"I don't care." His lips cut her off, his tongue finding hers. Of course his ploy worked; she lost her thoughts for a moment as she tasted the wetness of his mouth in hers. He nipped the bottom of her lip as his hands ran through her hair, tangling up strands around his fingers. She felt his lips moving down her chin to her neck and she arched it without provocation for his lips to skim, kissing tenderly where he had marked her.

"Arya. Arya, I love you. I've always loved you." His hands moved down to caress her shoulders. "You cannot marry him. You are meant to be my Queen, not his -" His lips grew more forceful, more insistent, as he made his way past her collarbone to the start of her bodice. She had only managed to unbutton the top two notches and she felt him fumbling at them, trying to undo them one by one. Oh gods, he meant to kiss her breasts. She tried to move her hands to help him when she heard the unmistakable rip of clothing as her bodice was torn down the middle. Well, that was one way to go about it.

"Jon!" Was it a protest at her ruined dress or the excitement? She didn't know, or care.

"I'll buy you more. Ten more, I don't care," he muttered, just before she felt wetness encircle her right nipple. She gasped as she felt his tongue flicking over it and then gently sucking. It shot straight down to between her legs as he continued, moving to her other breast to do the same as his hands worked feverishly to unbutton the rest of her gown. How he yanked it down and off she wasn't sure and she didn't care, but then she was only in her smallclothes. She looked up at him, his eyes darkened with desire, and she froze.

"Jon-I can't, I stopped you earlier because I -"

"I know, Arya, I know. I don't care. Do you think I would care?" His hands were on her smallclothes, and she thought she felt him trembling. "I want to kiss you, taste you -"

"What-what are you -" She bit her lip then as she felt him removing what little clothing she had left covering her body, leaving her exposed and naked as her nameday. Even her rags were gone. Oh gods, he knew, he knew! Her mind raced as she flushed in pure embarrassment and desire, but it was hard to stop him as she felt him kiss her navel, his body moving down while his hands skimmed over her whole body. It seemed his fingers were everywhere, on the underside of her breasts, over her rib cage and down her sides, even as his lips kissed around her bellybutton and down to her patch of curly dark hair, where he stopped. His hands caught up with his mouth and his fingers brushed lightly up against the top of her mound and then stopped. Her breath caught, she couldn't breathe, she was experiencing all these new sensations and she didn't know what to do with the feelings. She dared to look down and found his eyes already looking up at her. Her heart hammered even more wildly.

"Do you want this, Arya? If you tell me to stop, I will."

His voice, the pleading and the love and the lust emitted from his low voice and Arya shivered. She understood, he was giving her the power she didn't have when he took her maidenhead. All she would have to do is to tell him to stop, say that they shouldn't be doing this, that they could get caught, that they shouldn't do this in the King's home...
She bit her lip and closed her eyes. *She wasn't going to tell him to stop.*

Jon must have taken her cue because she felt his hands spreading her legs further apart and she tensed. Surely he would see the blood, no matter how light it was now, surely he could smell it. It had to disgust him, he would no doubt pull away. Then she felt his fingers run down through the hair to part her lips and she no longer worried as his wet, firm tongue flattened against her, making her shudder and whimper at the same time. She had to keep quiet, she had to, but this sensation was new and thrilling and it made her stiffen her legs. Her reaction must have encouraged Jon because she felt the rhythm of his tongue move faster in such a way that she felt something building inside her. Her moon's blood mattered little as she bucked up against him, her hands scrambling to find sheets to grab ahold of. She felt one hand snake under her, lifting her up into his mouth and she was unsure about her legs so she hoisted them around his head to lock at her ankles.

"You are mine," Jon growled against her, as she felt two fingers gently slide into her, crooking inside and slowly moving as if he had his cock inside her. She cried out softly at that, it seemed too much, his tongue licking and mouth now sucking on the little nub of protruding flesh while his fingers fucked her. The feeling in her, the intensity, the climbing toward something was building in her so quickly, she wasn't sure what to do, but she knew she was striving for something she had heard women do in the taverns she stayed at. She dared again to look down at him and he was already staring up at her, watching her reactions. It made her even more aroused and she moaned when he drew back far enough to where she could see his long, dark-pink tongue lick up through her folds. It was deliberate and she knew it, and loved it. Her heart was beating out of control and her whole body felt on fire. This pleasure was foreign to her. *It was better than any feeling she ever had with any of her kills.*

"Jon," she whispered. "Jon, I - I don't know what -"

"Just let go, Arya. My beautiful Arya. I'm here. I want you to just let go -" It was all he could get out, as he was lost in his own desires. She had never heard his voice so low and thick before as she closed her eyes again, throwing her head back into the pillow. She was close, close to something, and she arched her back, unabashedly thrusting up into his willing, talented mouth, moving her hips into him like she did the night he took her, only now it was his fingers and his tongue in her. She gasped when he removed his fingers and replaced it with his tongue, and the feeling of his tongue fucking her took her to the edge and she peaked with her first orgasm as he madly, roughly increased his thrusting to match hers.

"Jon!" The feeling crashed over her in pulsations and the pleasure exploded through her body as she felt the throbbing and wetness release into his mouth, which he lapped up and swallowed, and she shook through her release. "Jon, oh gods -" She fell back, the last of her climax ebbing, and she panted, whimpering and breathless.

It seemed as if he wasn't quite done down there; he withdrew his tongue but still explored her folds, gently now, following by planting small kisses. She was coming down, a little stunned, expecting him to unclothe and take her, but he kissed up the length of her body to her breasts, kissing each nipple before taking her in his arms.

"Arya." His eyes locked with hers. His mouth was wet and she saw a faint spot of blood on his lip. Embarrassed, she reached up to wipe it away but before she did so, his tongue licked around the entire scope of his lips. "It is you, Arya. It is your essence, and there's nothing to be ashamed of."

She felt him hard against her. His cock was at full attention and she could feel him hard as a rock. Yet he still had made no move to remove his breeches while she was bare underneath him.

"Jon." She reached down between them to unlace him. He stopped her and shook his head.
"No, Arya. I just wanted to please you. I needed to hear you cum."

"So that's what that was? Cumming?" She smiled then, running her fingers through his hair. "So that's what all the bawdy talk is about? It felt...it felt-" She brought his face in for a kiss. He tasted like rust and something tangy. It was her, of course. She was tasting herself. He pulled away and caressed her face, a wistful smile on his face.

"You know I cannot stay. I will fetch you some clean rags and tuck you in for bed, but I need to make my way to my own solar before I'm noticed." Regretfully he moved away from her to retrieve her smallclothes and look for the clean, neatly folded rags she kept in the top of the armoire.

Reality and the scope of the situation came crashing down. He admitted he loved her, gave her her first climax, but he would not lie with her and he could not sleep with her. She looked longingly at his lithe body, moving quickly and gracefully. He might claim he was a terrible dancer but he moved with such ease.

Like a child, she let him dress her back into her smallclothes, even allowing him to place the rags between her legs, before also submitting to him tucking her underneath the covers and tending to the fire. Arya was drowsy in the aftermath of pleasure and let him do as he would.

"I need to go. Now." He loomed over her, brushing an imaginary strand of hair from her face. "I will see you in the morning."

She nodded but said nothing as he slipped out just as easily as he slipped in. Her mind tried to move in all directions but all she did was drift off into a deep, solid sleep for the first time in years, and the last thing on her mind was the way he growled against her that she was his... but before that was the image of Gendry's accusing blue eyes angrily staring into her.
"You wanted to see me?" Arya stepped into Gendry's solar quietly, ignoring Jaime standing guard and shutting the door.

Gendry was standing with his back to her, his hands clasped behind him, staring out the window. There wasn't much to see but a distant wall that blocked a view of the sea as the rain pelted down. The rain that had misted during the sparring turned into a torrid storm that showed no signs of letting up. It was a welcome sight after the years long deep freeze of the Long Winter, and Gendry seemed fascinated. Usually he greeted her with exuberance and a dazzling smile, but he did neither. Instantly she was on guard.

"Please, sit," he murmured almost dreamily, not taking his eyes off of the window."You know, they say this fortress is protected by spells woven into it. I wonder now if it's still true, since there is no magic left in the world."

She didn't know what to say so she slid into a cushioned chair, smoothing down her dress and her hair. She stared at his back, covered in dark leather, and took in his broad shoulders. Guilt flooded her and she shifted uneasily. All she could think about was Jon's mouth between her legs not two night's past. They had been kept apart since then by countless council meetings and constant company, and it seemed there were guards posted at every turn. Arya was aware something had changed and knew it wasn't a positive thing. She resented not being in the meetings and wondered if she should demand to be present. But she was not a Queen yet, merely a Lady, and she could do nothing but seethe at her gender and wait for tidbits of information to be revealed.

Arya raked her small fingers through her hair, making sure her neck was covered. The mark had faded but she was still very much aware of it. She hadn't seen Gendry much, either, and it worried her. She came to him freshly bathed and in a fresh dress, thankful her moon's blood was gone at last. Brazenly she had wondered if she could somehow slip into Jon's rooms without hesitation and let things happen as they would, but now staring at Gendry's back, her feelings were mixed. Gendry, whom she promised to marry. Gendry, her friend and crush and now King. All she could see when she looked at him was the bastard blacksmith that befriended her when she had no one, before she became No One. Gendry, who had a good heart and fought bravely, forged Lightbringer, became legitimized, and inherited the crown. Gendry, for whom she burned the Red Witch.

Her fingers tapped the arm of her chair, the only sound in the room save the rain pelting the window.

"You're so quiet, Arry, something I didn't think you were capable of." Of course she couldn't see his expression and his tone was light but she couldn't decipher if he was serious or not. "Tell me, Arry, are you still willing to be my Queen?"

Her mouth went dry and she swallowed. There was nothing to fear from Gendry; her worry annoyed her as did her paranoia. This was just Gendry. Just Gendry. His question was simple and she wanted to reply with a simple answer, but her heart was more complicated than she - or he - could ever fully realize. Her rash decisions were coming to roost, and Arya cursed herself for letting her emotions mold her life. She knew she hesitated too long when Gendry sighed, pivoting from the window to face her, his bright blue eyes dulled, his smile tight.

"Maybe it's just as well. Did you know all of my council, with the exception of Ser Davos, have advised me against a marriage with you?"

Anger and shock flooded her as she stared up at him and her chin jerked upward.
"Did they give you a reason for it? Why would they not stand behind a union to the Lady of Winterfell? The last trueborn child of Eddard Stark with all of the North behind her -"

"Yes, 'tis true, but they take issue with your past actions. They say your mind is ill, and that a marriage with you would compromise the crown -"

"My mind is ill? Are you serious? What of the minds of your councilmen? And what of my actions? I avenged the Stark family, I fought in the Great War, I've never wavered in my loyalty to the North, even as a child out on my own, or to the crown once Cersei was disposed. I've placed the hardships of our people at the forefront and have done whatever I could to get us through the long winter. I would be loyal to my King in all matters. I could think of worse candidates for Queen."

"They have suggested Lady Lyanna Mormont or even Meera Reed, among others. I guess they think them more worthy of a Queen's title because they haven't made a human pie or burned a priestess."

His lips loosened his smile into a grin and he flashed his teeth, oddly perfect for a lowborn. "I love seeing you get your ire up."

"So what else are they saying behind my back? Well?" She stood up, her chair scraping the floor. Is that what your council does, obsess over who you should wed and bed?" She gritted her teeth. She didn't want to think of another woman in Gendry's bed.

"Among other things, yes. They can drone on all day if they'd like, but the choice is mine." He didn't attempt to stop her when she started pacing the generous room. "The Nobles are in a state of unrest, Arry, and I think a match with you would quell that. I've heard whisperings of a rebellion building in the North. For some reason the South is embracing me as King, yet the North takes issue with me for being a lowborn. Damn Highborns. They cling to the old way of thinking; once a bastard, that's all you should ever be. They support Jon well enough, but that is because he still has Eddard Stark's blood flowing in him as well from the poor ravaged Lyanna. The Starks are still revered and you and Jon are the last remaining blood. They see me as Robert Baratheon's bastard, an upstart granted legitimacy by a fucking Targaryen whore. See, I have some Targaryen blood, and it works against me in the North. Jon, on the other hand, has a stronger Targaryen bloodline, yet he is revered because of who his Uncle is -"

"Jon is revered for his bravery and loyalty and his sacrifices," she cut in, indignant. "It has nothing to do with blood."

"And I have not been brave and loyal? Have I not offered to grant the North independence for good? Arry, I want everyone to have a say in how their lives are lived. I refuse to be a Mad King or a King Joffrey or Queen Cersei. The Iron Throne was physically torn down at my behest. The common people love me for it. That at least should have earned me something from the North -"

"Most of the Houses of the North are extinct, and the ones that have survived follow Jon. Whatever rebellion would occur, you could squash them like a bug beneath your boot."

"That's the issue, Arry. They support Jon. And if they were to find out about Jon's legitimacy and stronger claim, I am sure there would be a rebellion to set him on the throne. Sometimes I think I would welcome it, but then I remember what war is like. I could simply abdicate if it came to that."

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"Then why marry at all? You could legitimize Jon, give him your crown, and become a minor Lord, live out your days occasionally making an appearance at Court with you pretty little lesser Lady-wife." It came out bitterly. She looked up at him into his pensive face, and understood why women
swooned over him. He was handsome, strong, good, and honest.

"Yes, it would be so easy, wouldn't it?" He let out short laugh. " King Jon and Queen Arya of the Seven Kingdoms."

"Gendry-" her mind jolted. "Gendry, I -"

"When, Arry? Can you answer me that?" His voice was without malice but careful.

"When.. what?"

"Arry, when did you start this affair with Jon?"

"I don't know what you're -"

"I'm not angry, Arya," he said quietly, his hands reaching for hers. "I just want to know. You accept my proposal after months of making me wait and then ride for Storm's End immediately. Then Jon follows. I suspected something had happened, but wasn't sure until I saw how you both were at the sparring, and at the celebration feast. That was to be our betrothal announcement, Arry, but I turned it into merely a celebration of you and Jon visiting, and got right proper drunk to drown out my suspicious mind." His gentle hands found hers and he pulled her close. He was massive against her tiny frame, his hands large and warm folding over her cool, trembling ones and she looked up into his eyes. "I'm not blind, Arry."

There was confusion in her heart as well as body. She loved Gendry. She had, after all agreed to be his Queen, and if she had no love of him she would never have considered it. She would have not ran to him after Jon's mindless fucking but would have instead fled elsewhere, to Bravos or Mereen, maybe even Dorne. There was a reason she sought out Gendry. He was the sweet part of her, her conscience, the good in her. Jon ignited a fire, a love that was fierce and all-encompassing and unapologetic, but Gendry was the calm and the light. He could make her laugh even when he infuriated her. He was - well, he was Gendry.

"I-" she paused. What could she say? "I don't know what I'm doing, " she answered honesty. "Please, Gendry, I - I love you. I do -"

"But you love Jon more." It wasn't accusatory, it was a simple statement. "Then why agree to marry me if you love him?"

"I -" Why did she? Was it because the feeling of being brother and sister still lingered in her mind, making her feel guilty over wanting Jon? Was it the desire to keep the peace with the nobles? Was it just a reaction to her first shocking experience with sex? With Gendry she knew she held all the cards, controlled what would happen in the relationship. With Jon she just didn't know; Jon would never be controlled. Perhaps in his younger years he could be manipulated, but death twice over and the wars and all the loved ones lost and all that he has seen had changed him, turned him into someone she didn't recognize as Jon of yesteryear. Her emotions with him were wild, confusing, and yet with Gendry there was certainty.

Suddenly, she felt like crying. Something she hadn't done for so long. She didn't want to lose Gendry, even as she longed for Jon's arms. She fought beside him in the Great War while Jon was fighting alongside his Dragon Queen. While Jon was planning strategy and marrying Sansa, she and Gendry sparred and trained, keeping company until the early hours of the morning, talking and focusing on improving their fighting skills and sharing dreams of the future while talking about the sins of the past. While Jon readied his army, Gendry held her tenderly and kissed her breath away while her body melted against him. Before Sansa died, she had managed to push her growing
Feelings for Jon aside and she enjoyed Gendry's attentions after their reunion. Had she been using him all this time? No. She cared for him, would even assent to being his wife and share a bed with him. He would never hurt her.

"Gendry. I don't know-"

Maybe it was his sad smile that formed, or his slightly raised eyebrows. Maybe it was his powerful build and strong arms, or his musky scent. She didn't really know but she reached up to pull his head down by his neck to kiss him. He resisted for a moment, then gave in, his lips greedily taking what she gave. It spread the warmth she felt the last time she kissed him this way and she pushed into him. He stumbled and she moved him around and made him stumble back, back, until he flopped down into the chair she had sat on and she jumped into his lap, hiking her skirts up around him. She pushed against him, feeling him growing hard against her. It was a heady rush, this sense of control and sway over him, She didn't want to lose him, she didn't want to give him up to some other Lady, she just didn't. Yet Jon - Jon seemed to be in the room, his presence was felt and she tried to block it out, banish him. She fumbled at Gendry's tunic as she felt his hot hands against her breasts and waist, then lower as he sought her out under her skirts and smallclothes. She eased up, tearing off his tunic to expose his heavily muscled chest.

"Arya -" Gendry was breathless, pleading. His lips found her neck, biting and sucking on the opposite side of Jon's mark, and her fingers dug into chest as she felt his teeth catching her delicate skin. It felt good. Before she realized she was doing it, she unlaced his breeches and reached down, snaking her hand down. She never felt a bare cock before and it was strange but intoxicating, and the sounds Gendry made spurred her on and she tugged the fabric down as far as it would go for easier access.

"Arya, Arry - be my Queen -" Gendry rasped.

_You are meant to be my Queen, not his._ Jon's voice flooded her.

"Gendry -" She gasped when his hand touched her folds.

"Arry. Please stay here with me- please -"

_"You are mine."_ Jon. The memory teased her.

The knock on the door startled them both. Gendry yanked his hand from her already damp center and Arya nearly jumped off his lap, quickly adjusting her smallclothes and smoothing her skirts down. Gendry sprang out of the chair, fumbling with the laces of his breeches and trying to button up his tunic. Arya couldn't help but smile a little at the sight, even as her mind was racing with thoughts of Jon. Gendry smiled back. She looked down; there was no hiding his arousal, that was for sure.

He strode over to the door and opened it, face-to-face with Jon.

Arya stood frozen as Jon looked Gendry up and down before resting his gaze onto her. They locked eyes and her arousal increased even as she felt a trickle of regret and irrational desperation.

His eyes were cold and angry.
A Rash Decision

Chapter Summary

I apologize for the long wait....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Milord, I don't know if this is the way to go, if you can forgive me for -"

"Ser Podrick, we can cast away formalities, considering the circumstances. Do not call me Lord again on this ship."

Jon cast a sympathetic glance over at Pod, seated miserably in the teetering wooden chair, a bit green in the gills and looking quite like he was ready to bow over the pot again that he clutched to his chest. It wasn't too long ago that they had been gone from Shipbreaker Bay, and Podrick was still retching from the turbulent waters and his own fears of meeting an untimely demise, given the area's history.

"Only a lord could afford two of the finest cabins on this ship," countered Pod, before lowering his head to vomit. Fortunately there wasn't much left in him at this point.

Pod had him there and Jon fell silent at the small table he shared with him. His gaze left the puking man and drifted over to Arya, lying curled up on the ample bed, her long, messy hair half-covering her pale face. She did not stir at the loud vomiting in close proximity. In sleep she had a peaceful look about her, something that never carried over to her waking moments. He was nearly close enough to reach out and touch her, but he refrained. For being one of the finest cabins, there wasn't room for much else than a bed, small table with two chairs, a tall but narrow cabinet, and a chamber pot in the corner. His and Pod's room boasted of two beds but wasn't much bigger than this one.

They were on their way back to Winterfell; only part of their travel would be sailing north on the Narrow Sea, instead of journeying by land. It was all calculated but not well thought out, although Jon could not imagine having to travel by horse with Arya in such a state. Guilt flooded him and he studied her in the candlelight. He knew when she fully came to she would be furious with him, but he was hoping against all hope that she would give him time to explain himself.

"Are you sure she was given the correct dose? She seems too still," Jon asked worriedly. "She has not moved since I placed her in bed."

"I don't know," Pod admitted, a bit fearfully. "The maester I visited was explicit in his instructions so I would say yes. But Milady is small. I had not thought of that."

Yes, Arya had a small frame; thankfully Jon had no troubles carrying her onboard, explaining to the crew his lady wife was not feeling well and assured them she did not have the fever sickness, even allowing her forehead to be felt, although he tensed at a stranger touching her skin. Spiriting her out of Storm's End was a bit more difficult but she had at least been semi-alert then, just drugged enough not to resist what they were doing, yet not drugged enough to completely pass out.
"Don't worry, Pod, if there is an adverse affect, I will not place it on your head," reassured Jon, but Pod gave him a look from those big dark eyes as if he did not believe it. After all, he would be the closest in proximity to an enraged Jon if Arya should die from an overdose, and Pod had seen enough in the past several years to know that Jon seldom raged, but when he did, there was no mercy for those around. And this wasn't just anyone. This was Arya.

"Milord, what are-what are you going to do when she wakes? I would think she will be angry with us. I don't want to see an angry Lady Arya."

Jon merely nodded, distracted. He didn't want to see an angry Arya either.

"Go to our room and sleep," he finally suggested. "I will stay with Lady Arya until she awakes. I'll sleep on the floor if needs be," he added as an afterthought, although he knew he did not mean it.

"What if - what -" Pod retched into the bowl for a moment, mostly dry-heaving. He coughed and raised his head. "Where is Needle?"

For a moment a smile ghosted Jon's face.

"Needle is safely sheathed and in our room. She has no weapon to use against me other than her words and her fists. Go. You are not well."

Pod shakily pushed the chair back and, clutching his puke pot, managed a curt bow before leaving, his uneven steps thunking across the wooden planks. Jon followed him to the door to bolt it. He trusted no one, especially passengers on a ship.

He made his way back over to Arya and hesitated before leaning over her, smoothing the hair away from her face to feel her forehead. She was cool to the touch, not flushed, and she was breathing normally. He had not thought of the possible risks - physically or mentally - from what they had done. He only knew she needed to return to Winterfell where she belonged and knew she would not go willingly.

"Arya?" His voice was low but strong. Finally there was some movement, a slight move of her head. "Arya, can you wake up for me?" He eased down to sit beside her on the bed and tentatively reached out to touch her shoulder, recoiling when she responded by lying on her back. It seemed wrong to touch her now, as much as he wanted to, even though he had touched her far more intimately than this before. He hated himself for deceiving her into drinking the spiked ale as he reassured her he was not angry over seeing her in the aftermath of a heated moment with Gendry.

He was angry. Angry at her, at Gendry, at himself.

His only intention was to summon Gendry to the Council Room for yet another useless meeting. Jon had found it odd that no one there had cared that the King was not present, and even Ser Davos seemed nonplussed. It was when they started discussing the possibility of a Northern Rebellion that he stood up and insisted, as the representative for the North, that the King hear all pertinent information. Everyone deferred to him, even the Hand of the King, and he swept from the room with Davos' nodded consent. It was then that Jon realized that with the exception of Davos, no one gave much credence to Gendry. He had won the love of the common people but not the respect of the Lords or any man with a scrap of influence. Jon, on the other hand, had not just the adoration of the masses for his loyalties and actions during the Great War and Long Night, but the Northern Lords still referred him as King In The North; even the Southern Lords begrudgingly respected "The White Wolf." Yet fate and a Dragon Queen had forced Gendry into a role he never thought he would achieve in his wildest dreams, whereas Jon clung to his faux illegitimacy to avoid Gendry's fate. Even so, Jon wondered if it had been fair to Gendry, and concluded it was not. He was a good King
in some aspects, yet Jon knew he would never have the support of the Lords.

For that, his life and crown would always be in danger, even if he had yet to realize it.

Jon rather liked Gendry, the lad had a good and stout heart. He was strong and brave like his father had been and if things were different, he would have been happy to welcome him as family into his home. That sentiment died completely when Gendry opened the door to his solar with his tunic buttoned wrong, the top lace of his breeches still undone, and an undeniably massive erection outlined against his trousers. It was worse to see Arya standing there, flushed a light pink, her lips swollen and wet, obviously from kissing. He knew she could see the anger in his eyes when she met his gaze and then dropped her eyes to the floor, something so uncharacteristic of such a naturally bold, forward woman. It permeated of guilt and Jon had a moment of wanting to unsheathe Longclaw and slice Gendy's cock off.

It took all his willpower to not rage and maim. Instead he focused on the task at hand, and took Arya out of his focus, allowing him only enough sanity to lead Gendry away to the Council Room, not looking back to see Arya's reaction. The roaring in his ears made it difficult to walk along the corridor with Gendry beside him, and the resuming of the meeting was intolerable. He had paid little heed and contributed nothing until the issue of marriage was brought up. Of course everyone was suggesting a Northern bride to satisfy the Northern Lords. Lady Mormont was now of a marriageable age, and Lady Wylla Manderly, along with Lady Meera Reed, were the other options mentioned. No one breathed Arya's name, which was a good thing, because Jon would have stricken the head from the shoulders of anyone uttering it. Gendry diverted the topic, yet Jon's jealous eyes noticed the King was not mentally involved in any of the meeting. He flexed his hand on Longclaw and almost lunged at the man when he observed Gendry touching his smiling lips with his fingertips before discreetly rubbing them across his nose, smelling them. It enraged him, as he knew what Gendry was doing; the same thing Jon himself did not two nights past, when he breathed in Arya's scent and licked her dried secretions off of his own fingers. It was all he could do to sit immobile until the end of it all and then storm out and hide in his solar, seething and tense. He knew at that point, he had to leave Storm's End, and that Arya needed to go with him. He had been certain she would not go of her own volition.

Milk of the poppy had been an act of desperation. He had tracked down Podrick, the only man in the castle he trusted, and instructed him to obtain it from the resident Maester. Jon was not an expert in potions and medicines, and asked only that the mixture be powerful enough to dull the senses; and if the Maester could produce him an alternative that could be discreetly added in to a drink, he would be rewarded handsomely. So, Podrick had returned with something Jon had no knowledge of, and any guilt in coaxing Arya to his solar for a late night conversation and a specially flavored drink faded away when he thought of Gendry smelling her scent on his hand.

Everyone had retired for the evening, so there were only the guards to contend with. He and Pod were able to escort Arya out of the castle and to the horses without much suspicion before the concoction took its full effects. Podrick had packed their belongings and stashed them in the stables under hay beforehand. By then Arya could not mount her horse, so Jon sat her in front of him on his and they left quietly. The guards at the gate were easily persuaded that they had the King's leave, and if they thought it strange that Arya was nearly passed out in Jon's arms, they said not a word. Thankfully the storms had temporarily stopped, yet Jon tightened Arya's coat around her and they made their way to Shipbreaker Bay to gain passage on the next ship to leave the docks.

Presently Jon looked down at Arya, her hair spread in twists over the pillow, her hands fist ing the covers. Much like when she fist ed the sheets when he went down on her, only now her expression was passive, almost serene, whereas before her mouth had been slightly open, her little cries and moans embedded into his memory.
Jon closed his eyes, seeing her naked and writhing in pleasure as he worked her to her climax. *Even with her moonblood she was the best thing he had ever tasted, and he refused to give her up, even to the King*. If Arya entered into a union with Gendry, she would be lost to him forever and he could not - *would not* - accept it. Let Gendry marry another Northern Lady.

*This one was his.*

Opening his eyes, he moved to lie down on his side next to her, snaking a protective arm around her waist. This was a new feeling, lying in bed with her, holding her. He had held Ygritte under the furs, held Sansa as she sought comfort, but this was different. His whole body ached for her while a sensation of tranquility swept over him. He wanted to yank the covers off and explore her body and yet he wanted to drift off to sleep feeling her flush against him. He fought the intensity and embraced the tenderness as he moved in closer, leaning in to press a chaste kiss to her cheek before lying his head on the pillow next to her.

He had no idea how she would react when she came to, but they had a long travel ahead of them to parse it all out. He knew she loved him, he knew he loved her. She had told him she missed Winterfell. Was he not acquiescing to her wishes by taking her home? There was nothing amiss about the Lord and Lady of Winterfell leaving for home, was there? For a moment he envisioned Gendry rushing him with his warhammer, striking a blow to his head. Jon had committed no act of treason. Arya was not Gendry's betrothed.

He burrowed his head into her neck, breathing her in.

*If he think she is, then by all means let him come and fight me.*

Chapter End Notes

Gendry will have a POV in the next chapter~
Gendry was restless, tossing and turning in his overly large bed. He still hadn't gotten accustomed to the finer trappings of being King, and the bed was one of them. It was ornate, massive, and plush, topped with the finest covers and furs. It was far better than anything he had in Fleabottom, of course, and when he joined the Brotherhood Without Banners, a bed was a rare find, unless it was at a run-down inn. It had been hard to adjust over these past few years, and luxury still did not sit well with him. The only thing he liked was the finery he could wear, the weapons he could spar with, and the food, which was infinitely better than what he was used to. Even at that, he balked, insisting that if most of the kingdom was scrounging for food and near to starvation, then he had no right to a feast. Now with spring upon them for the first time in years, he could relax that rule a little, and relax it he did when celebrating Jon and Arya's visit.

Arry.

He smiled into the darkness, bringing his hand to his nose. He managed to go through the evening without washing his hand, in the hopes to retain some of her scent, but it had faded. He had his memory, though, and he recalled her sitting in his lap, so bold and passionate and tiny in his arms. Whatever her reasons for agreeing to be his bride, she could not pretend she didn't feel anything for him on a physical level. She had so much wetness between her legs that he nearly lost it when his fingers touched her there. They would do well together. He knew a fiery yet passionate woman like Arya would keep him fascinated and faithful for years to come. He was a little intimidated by her but that, too, was a turn-on.

He could see no disadvantages with Arya as his Queen, even as his council harped at him that she was not the best choice. They brought up her mental state as much as they dared, knowing Gendry could order their heads chopped off a the slightest provocation. Gendry himself could not see the far-reaching power he had; even if he could, he wouldn't believe it. It was hard enough to believe he was King. All he did to earn it was to be of the right bloodline and legitimized by Daenerys Targaryen. There were sparse options for an heir, and Dany chose him because of his Targ blood, thin though it was. Yes, he forged Lightbringer and fought in the battles of the Great War, but Jon was the rightful heir. His blood tie was much stronger, and he was literally the one who saved mankind from destruction. Yet before the final battle and Dany's death, he enraged her by marrying his cousin Sansa. Odd how Dany didn't see anything strange about planning to marry her nephew, but a Targ is a Targ. Worse still that getting Sansa with child took no time at all. No doubt she felt like a woman scorned.

Gendry often wondered how close he himself came to becoming the Dragon Queen's consort. He knew Dany had expected to live through the Great War, and there were few choices. He knew for certain he was on the short list. At least he could breathe easy knowing he could never be forced to marry her. She had been lovely, yes, and he could will his body to bed her, yet she evoked no feelings of love or lust or passion. It would have been an odd, cold marriage, and that was one thing Gendry did not want.

Besides the crown.

He was on the same level with Jon on that one. He never had any ambitions and could not understand all the power-hungry Lords, he only understood none of the Lords had what it took to be a king, besides Jon, and Jon just plain didn't want it. After being a king for a few years, Gendry
could understand why, but Jon could be a great king. Now with the legal marriage verified between Jon's parents, he could easily stake his claim and rule, and would no doubt do far better than what he was doing. Gendry had very little education and could barely read and write, and he wasn't brought up in the world of Lords and men of power. He knew nothing of intrigues and backstabbing, and left the bulk of handling things of that nature to Ser Davos. His Hand was knowledgeable and more than capable. Davos Seaworth would make a better King than he would. Yet the common public loved him. They saw him as one of them and humility was something he wore honestly. He was just a bastard after all. There were some ideas he had that made sense, such as dismantling the iron throne, reconstructing King's Landing, and letting the people have a say in how they are governed, but when it came to matters of pedrify he was lost.

He'd be happier as a blacksmith. Or living on a small farm.

Even matters of the heart were political. He was expected to marry and breed and his Council seemed too interested in what was going on below his waist, treating him as nothing more than a bull put up for stud. He knew Kings and Lords needed heirs but why was there so much interest in who he chose to bed? In his heart he chose Arya. Politically she was also an excellent match. The North still revered the Starks and she was the last child of Eddard. She was the last trueborn Stark. Whatever the Northerners felt about him as King, with one of their own as Queen, surely their restlessness would be quelled. Then again, Lady Mormont was respected and she had not the reputation of madness about her; even the outspoken, green-haired Lady Manderly was more appealing to them. She, at least, was not a famed assassin.

But he could not imagine pouring sons into the wombs of Lyanna or Wylla or any other Lady. Of course he could perform. That wasn't the issue. He just wanted his sons to come from the woman her cared for. The woman he loved. He was sure he loved Arya.

But now he was sure Jon loved Arya as well.

In the dark, Gendry clenched his jaw. He liked Jon, respected him, looked up to him even. It was hard not to be in awe of the man, the myth, the legend that was Jon Snow.

He wasn't stupid. He'd seen the looks between Jon and Arya and they had an air about them that was far different than in the past. With the timing of their arrivals, and Arya's confession of being no maiden, and her non-denial of being in love with Jon, he guessed jealously that Jon was the one she gave her maidenhead to. He would never ask her outright but he knew. A man such as Jon was not one to dally with a lady lightly. Especially his own sister-turned-cousin.

He could, out of spite, publicly declare the betrothal, and Arya would have no choice but to marry him. It would easily mean Jon could be dispatched back to Winterfell and Arya would be in his bed until the day he died. But he refused to force Arya into a corner. Besides, she would no doubt slit his throat before being forced against her will to to anything. No, Arya needed to come to him of her own volition. And she did, she came to him and sat on his lap, and had Jon not interrupted, he was sure she would have easily fooled him in the chair.

Gendry threw an arm across his eyes.

It was too quiet and he was too restless.

He wondered if Arya was sleeping. Maybe she was just as restless as he. He sprung out of the bed grappling for his clothes. True, it was the middle of the night, but he needed to see her. At first he hesitated but then remembered he was the King. He could demand entry into any solar and at any time that he chose.
He easily swept past the guards at his door and quietly slipped down the corridor to Arya's solar. Cautiously he knocked. When it evoked no response, he knocked more forcibly.

"Lady Arya?" Nothing. "Arry - are you awake?"

He tried the knob; her door opened and he poked his head in, hesitant.

"Arry?"

The room was dark, the fire low; there was enough light to reflect the fact that her bed was empty. Gendry's mind jolted for a moment before he slammed the door and strode down to Jon's room. What he would do if he found them together he did not even know.

Jon's guest solar was unguarded as well, and Gendry tried the door without knocking. It was also unlocked, and as with Arya's room, he found no one in it. The hearth was cold. For a moment Gendry breathed a sigh of relief but it didn't last long. Both Arya and Jon were missing, and Gendry had a feeling they were together. What did he do now? Return to his solar and pretend he didn't know? Or did he go look for them?

His mind racing, he strode through the castle and out into the night, crossing over to the stables. He noticed Jon and Arya's horses were missing. Glaring around, he noticed a guard roaming, on watch.

"You!" He bellowed over to the guard, who bowed in greeting. "Have you seen Lord Jon and Lady Arya?"

"Your Grace, they left the castle several hours ago. With Ser Podrick Payne."

"You, it wasn't a lover's tryst if they had Pod with them. Pod had come with Arya.

"Did Lady Arya say where they were going in the middle of the night?" Thank the gods it had stopped raining. He would hate for her to catch a chill.

"No - No, Your Grace. Lady Arya- Lady Arya was on Lord Jon's mount. She was sleeping, Your Grace -"

"Sleeping?" Gendry's blood started to boil. "And you thought to not question it?"

"They said they had your leave, Your Grace. Ser Podrick slipped a coin into our hands -"

"So you took a bribe." Gendry stared down the uneasy guard. "Did they say anything else? Where they were going?"

"No, Your Grace. They - they had bags with them, I thought they were traveling home."

Home.

Winterfell.

Lying. Claiming he knew they were departing. Arya, asleep in Jon's arms. There was not a chance that Arya would not be alert and riding her own horse. She was not ill, that much was obvious when they had their interrupted tryst.

It was obvious. Jon had kidnapped her. Drugged her, no doubt.

Drugged.
Maester Estire.

He turned and left the guard there, running back to the castle, sprinting up a long, winding back staircase to the Maester's room, pounding on the door. He didn't care if he waked the whole damn castle.

The old man creaked the door open, shock written plainly on his aged face at facing the King at an odd hour of night. He stood in his smallclothes, a causal brown shift of sorts, his white hair askew.

"Your Grace -"

"Did Lord Jon or Ser Podrick come to see you?"

"Um, yes. I mean, maybe. Yes. Ser Podrick, the lad with brown hair and soft brown eyes? The soft-spoken one? Let me think.. he asked for a sleep aid, something strong and something that could be mixed in with a drink."

"Did you not stop and ask what it was for?"

"Your Grace, I assumed it was to sleep." He looked startled. "Sleep the sleep of the dead, is what was requested. Poor lad looked a bit high-strung, I thought it was for him."

Gendry didn't want to hear anymore.

He pivoted and headed straight for Ser Davos' room.

A knock brought Ser Davos immediately to the door. He was fully dressed and alert, which raised Gendry's suspicions. He stode into the room, noting the lit candles on the desk, papers strewn about.

"Your Grace, what brings you by at this unnatural hour?"

"Jon has taken Arya and left the castle. Pod is with them."

"Are they traveling home? I thought Lady Arya would be staying."

"Jon took her without her consent." Gendry started to feel the anger. Anger at the betrayal, the disrespect, the underhanded tactic. Anger at this happening under his nose and it seemed no one was going to take this seriously. Not even Davos, who seemed so calm.

"I don't think Jon is capable -"

"You know what Jon is capable of. You served him long enough. The reason Jon is alive right now is because of you. You were his most trusted advisor and no doubt he would have made you his Hand if he would have been King. Don't stand there and say something you know isn't true."

"Your Grace, I serve you. I accepted to be the Hand of the King."

"Aye, you did. I am sure you feared such a slow-witted man as king would have destroyed the Seven Kingdoms so what choice did you have but to accept? I am no better than my father, leaving his Hand to rule while he went out drinking and whoring. And things are going on behind my back just as things went on behind his. Only the difference is that I care."

"No one said you didn't, Your Grace. I am sure there is a reasonable explanation for this. Get some sleep, we will."

"No." His anger melded into something different; defiance and acceptance at the same time. "I am
readying my horse and I am going to find them. You have complete control while I am gone. I'll call in Ser Jaime as witness, and I will relinquish all kingly duties to you. You will rule in my stead. Shouldn't be too hard, considering you've done it all along."

"Gendry -"

"I never asked for this, Davos. Maybe you should have let the Red Witch kill me. To what purpose did you save my life? You saved Jon's, he went on to be the savior of the world. And I? A puppet king. No better than a Tommen Baratheon."

"You forged Lightbringer, which in turn brought down the Night King. You had your own role in saving mankind from destruction. You are a good King. The people love you -"

"Yet they love Jon more. Jon should have been crowned King."

"Queen Daenerys named you as her legitimized heir."

"Yes, because Jon married Sansa Stark. I was only legitimized because Dany wanted Jon for herself. I was the only one left with Targ blood in me. If she had lived I would have been a consort to the Queen and would have been put up for stud to produce Targ heirs. Little did she know, little did we all know, Jon's claim to the throne was stronger than hers."

"Your Grace, Jon is still a bastard."

"No, Davos, he isn't, and he doesn't need a legitimized bastard King's decree to make it so." He drew a breath, motioning. "There is something you need to see. I have it in my solar."

Ser Davos had no choice but to follow Gendry, stopping along the way at a guard, ordering Ser Jaime and Ser Bronn be awakened and brought to the King's solar. Once back in his room, Gendry retrieved the parchment from a locked box and handed it over to Davos, no words necessary. As Davos scanned the document, Gendry readied himself to leave. He hesitated on his warhammer and instead grabbed his sword; lighter for travel.

"Does Jon know of this?" Davos looked up at him with surprise.

"Jon has one, according to Samwell Tarly. The third remains at the Citadel. There are three legal decrees that are known. I've not had a chance to confront Jon about it. I've had...other issues on my mind. But it needs to addressed."

"Yes, it does." Davos looked suddenly very old and frail as he sighed, still clutching the aged paper. 
"Jon is not one to try to take the throne from anyone." He said it quietly, calmly.

"He can bloody have it. There is only thing I want, and I am leaving to go get it." Gendry's left hand flexed on the pommel of his sword.

Jaime and Bronn appeared, looking none too happy at the summons in the middle of sleep. Nevertheless, they were in full gear, swords at their sides, silently questioning, looking at Gendry set to travel.

"Ah, good. Excuse me for a moment, your Grace." Davos nodded lowered his head down, stepping out into the hallway and closing the door behind him. Gendry could hear nothing but didn't care as he looked around the room, making sure he had what he needed. He would make haste for Winterfell. It was a long journey but with Jon having to travel with an inebriated Arya and a no doubt protesting Pod, he might be able to make up the time and reach them sooner. But which way would they have traveled? The surely would be avoiding any main roads, and possibly take the road
less traveled. Then again, Gendry knew Jon would not take risks with Arya's welfare. Well, maybe take the risk of kidnapping her away from the King, but -

The door opened and Davos, Jaime, and Bronn came in. Before he knew what was happening, Bronn was on him in an instant, unsheathing his sword and handing it to Davos. Caught off guard and completely shocked, it took little effort for Bronn and Jaime to restrain him at the arms.

"What - Davos - what is going on? What are you fucking doing?"

"Preventing a war," Davos said point-blank. "And saving your life."

Chapter End Notes

Next: Arya wakes up....
"Sansa called me Horseface again." She wanted to cry but Sansa's called her that name too many times for that. It still bothered her even though she wouldn't let on. Sansa was so pretty, everyone complimented her on everything. Arya tried to be a little lady but she loved archery and swords more. They were fascinating to her.

"And when does it matter what Sansa thinks? You are stronger than that."

Jon looked down at her, his gentle smile reassuring her.

"Sansa calls you a bastard and it makes you sad," she countered, watching her half-brother practicing with his sword. He was graceful and serious. She wanted to spar with him but she was too upset, and besides, she knew he always let her win. She longed for the day she was bigger and he could let her spar with him for real. Father looked the other way when Jon helped her learn. Father knew she was never going to be like Sansa and she was sure deep down he approved.

Jon's eyes darkened. There was pain in them. She knew that look well whenever they talked about him being a bastard. She regretted saying it, but he was what he was. To her he was her brother. Even more so than Robb or Bran or Rickon. She loved her brothers but she loved Jon best.

"I am a bastard," he said sadly. "But you are not a horseface. You are pretty. Just in a different way." He leaned into her to whisper, as if there was anyone around to hear. "In a much better way, you know. You hear how everyone says you look like your Aunt Lyanna? She was very beautiful on all accounts. Sansa never has been compared to her."

"You look like me, Jon. So you look like Aunt Lyanna as well? Does that make you beautiful, too?" She knew him to be. Beautiful with his dark grey eyes and dark curly hair. He was still a greenboy and was trying so hard to grow a beard like father's, she knew, with no success yet. She couldn't imagine him old and greying like Father was.

"I'm not a girl, Arya," he admonished. "Beauty is for girls."

She did not think so. Beauty was found inside, too. Isn't that what Mother said to her one time when she caught Sansa calling her ugly?

"Do you think Sansa is beautiful?" The thought ate at her stomach. Sansa was beautiful. She has not yet flowered but she could tell boys and men alike appreciated how she looked and acted. She was meant to be a Princess if ever there was one meant to be one. Sansa had her dreams of a Prince and living happily ever after. She would have it, too. Sansa had everything. Well, except Jon. But that was because she didn't want him. He was a bastard to her and nothing much more.

"Arya, Sansa is ugly when she calls you names."

It was the response she hoped for and she flung herself into his arms, hugging him tight, nearly knocking him over. He smelled good as she held him tight and he hugged her back, his face buried into her hair. She burrowed into him harder. He always made her feel better. She hoped she did the same for him when he was saddened. He was never a bastard in her eyes. He was always her brother - -
The screams and howls and clanking of swords. The horses galloping and bodies falling. Fire reaching the sky. The smoke was thick and dark. Everything was deafening and blinding and she wielded her sword at anything moving towards her. Wight after wight. Man after man. They would not survive. She would die. Jon would die. Ghost. Nymeria. She could hear their growls and howls as they tore limbs apart. She had to find Jon, see him. Blood splattered her face and she reached up to wipe her eyes. Push on, push forward, but to what. There was no Wall, nothing to reach for. The only wall was the stream of wights and smoke, choking her, pulling her down. What do we say to the God of Death. Today. Today is the day.

Jon. Beyond the haze she could see. Jon. Dany. The Dragon Queen had fallen. A stream of light in flames on a sword. Jon. The Knight King. No. Nearer now, nearer. See me, Jon. See. Know. At this last, know. And he looks at her, sees her and she sees him through the death and destruction and fall of humanity and she knows. She knows. She calls out to him and it means nothing as the sword plunges into Jon's chest. The God of Death claims. And it claims the Knight King when Jon's last act is to pierce the flame in his iced heart. The force is overwhelming and she feels it, she is falling down, down, down into ground and everything falls with her and she is soundlessly screaming - -

With a jolt, Arya flutters her eyes open. She feels groggy, strange, and she is clutching something and something is holding her tight. Something like leather and the scent is reassuring and very much alive. Breathing. There is no death, only the smell of leather and earth and goodness. She moves in closer take a deep breath. Jon.

Jon?

She tilts her head up and sees his chin and his hair is a mess of curls. She is lying side-by-side with him, facing him, grabbing onto his tunic. Why is he in her bed? It didn't make sense. She was fully clothed. Her head felt like it was stuffed full of straw. Or something.

She felt him move and she pushed away from him a little so his face could come into focus and her hand reached up to his cheek, wavering before she placed it on his scruff. His eyes opened and he smiled at her, that old familiar smile she had known since babyhood. It felt maybe like she was still in a dream, dizzy thoughts trying to form in her mind as she sought out those smiling lips, drawing them into a kiss. It felt like life and peace and the slow parting again and again awakened her. She felt warm, almost too warm, the heat traveling up the back of her neck and she thinks she could wake up to this every day for the rest of her life. She feels his hands run through her hair and his body moving into her after the covers are shoved aside. She drapes a leg around him, foot digging into his buttocks to push him in and she feels through their layers of clothing that he is hard. Her whole body feels like fire melting against him and she thinks she is falling down, down, down when she is already down, demanding more of his light kisses, his lips, his tongue, and he is gentle, kind, but she feels the passion and it flows down between her legs.

Jon. This is Jon. This is the sweetness of Jon she remembers, the Jon untainted by death and destruction and betrayal and sickness and grief. This is the Jon she knew as a little girl. The sweet part of him that somehow ignited fire in her -how is this possible, to feel this fire from his lips, from his hands caressing her cheeks down to cup her face? This thread of desire was frightening almost, she was not frightened of anything anymore, but this was an intensity she never knew, not even from Gendry's lips -

Gendry.

She reluctantly broke away, breathless, her mind focusing, sharpening. Jon shouldn't be here with her like this in her room, not in the King’s residence, not -

Jon's lips tenderly brushed along her chin and down to her neck, his hands daring no more than to
skim down to her shoulders to her back, to draw her into him. She felt the room move. Was the room moving? Why was she so disoriented? She never took issue with waking up, even if she had a bad night's sleep, and she had had many of those.

"Jon." Her voice cracked, seemed so far away. "Jon."

"Arya." He whispered against her skin. "So glad you are awake. You're safe."

Safe? She glanced around Jon at the room. This was not her solar. Or Jon's. The haze of the sparse candlelight showed her a diminutive room, nearly bare. The room did move, she swore it did. She heard voices. Not the Kingsguard or Council or ladies or lords. She heard -

"Jon, where - where are we?" Stupid thing to ask, really. Only she didn't know.

"We are going home, Arya." She could have slapped him for the way he abandoned his lips on her skin and pulled back, his hands once again holding her face. "Back to Winterfell."

Back to Winterfell. Going home? In a bed? Was she still dreaming?

No, this was no dream.

She shoved his hands away and bolted up in bed, her head pounding and heart racing. Jon joined her, sitting up, and she stared at him. His mouth was wet with kissing, his eyes turning from lipid pools of love and desire to ones of caution and - what was that - fear?

Suddenly it came back to her in fragments. Jon inviting her for a late night dinner in his solar. She readily agreed, meaning to talk about him catching her in Gendry's solar, planning on being defiant, but she must have drunk too much ale because she didn't remember...yes, she remembered something...it was a dream, she was riding with Jon on his horse, she heard the vibrations of words coming from his chest and she nestled into him, it was just...no, it wasn't a dream. It wasn't a dream. The familiar sounds around her and the room seemingly moving... she knew these sounds, this feeling. She remembered her first travel by ship. Braavos. Alone, scared, but determined, it seemed a lifetime ago. That was another Ayra...

She was on a fucking boat. Ship. Whatever. How -

Jon's planned dinner. Jon's push for her to drink the ale, she remembered he asked her to try it, a new blend, it tasted - different - and she drained the cup. She felt -strange. Jon never pushed her to try anything before. It seemed strange how insistent he was. He had smiled at her, he looked relieved when she drank -

"Arya." Jon's voice pulled her back. His tone was cautious. "Arya, please listen to what I have to say -"

You are meant to be my Queen, not his. You are mine.

Her mouth tasted bitter now that Jon was no longer kissing her. She wondered if he could taste the bitterness and suddenly knew where that aftertaste came from. She had only been six when she was struck with illness, bedridden for days. To help her sleep Mother gave her a very tiny dose of milk of the poppy, and it had a bitter aftertaste that lasted for days. Just like the love and patience in Jon's eyes, she could never forget that horrible taste.

"You -" She stumbled out of the bed, her feet unsure on the planks. Wooden planks.

"Arya, I did it for you. Please, hear me out."
She backed away from him as he moved off the bed, his hands held up in a surrender mode. He stopped and didn't advance any further, treating her like a wild horse he was attempting to tame. It made sense now, Jon drugged her to take her away from Storm's End. From Gendry. He thought she would not go willingly, that she would remain stubborn and stay at Storm's End and marry Gendry in haste. After all, he did catch her trying to compose herself after an intimate moment with him. He didn't want her to marry Gendry, of course. He wanted her to go home with him to Winterfell.

Did he ever think to perhaps to just ask?

Did he think her such a featherbrain that she couldn't be trusted with her own decisions? She was Arya Stark, not some simpering fool without a thought in her head besides what she could get between her legs. Did he take her for a fool? He knew her better than that. He took away the ability to make her own choice.

"Arya, my dearest -"

"Get away from me." Her eyes darted around the room. There was nothing of hers here. No Needle. No dagger. Nothing. "What have you done?"

"We are going back to Winterfell. Arya, you do not want to marry Gendry -"

"How do you know what I want?" The anger started rushing to her head.

"Because I know you. I won't let you make a choice you will regret the rest of your days." He took two steps forward, his hands still up. "No one will think anything of us leaving -"

"Do you realize what you have done?" Her voice gained strength and she raised it. "There is no way Gendry will believe I left without his leave and without saying goodbye."

"He knows I would never hurt you -"

"Does he? I wouldn't be too sure about that, Jon. Do you even know what you have started?"

"I've sent a raven from the ship to Storm's End, assuring you are safe and we are heading back -"

"Hang the raven! And hang you, too! At least, that's what Gendry will do -"

"I've committed no treason. You are Lady of Winterfell and therefore underneath my care. You are legally mine as you are of House Stark -"

"Yours? I am not yours. I am no one's! No one's! I am not your property. I am not your ward. I am not your sister. Or your wife." She was aware she was shouting. "As for House Stark, I am the last full-blooded Stark of Winterfell. Aren't you half House Targaryen? The rightful heir to the Throne of the Seven Kingdoms? Take your legal place as King, then maybe you can claim me as property then, force me to marry you and give you heirs. Just like you forced me onto this fucking ship!"

He paled, his hands dropping to his side in fists. In the dim light she saw his face harden.

"Yes, that's right, I know! Gendry knows! He has a marriage decree of your parents in his hands right now. I know now from the look on your face you had one as well. Why, Jon? Why are you so intent on clinging to your bastard status when your whole life you've despised it? Why in Seven Hells did you kidnap me? Do you know who you are acting like? Your true father!"

He was over to her in an instant and she ran for the door, almost making it before he grabbed her arm. She struggled. He was stronger, of course.
"My true father will always be Eddard Stark. He is the man that loved me and raised me. Aye, he is my uncle, but blood does not make a father." He swallowed. "I knew you would not leave on your own accord, as bull-headed as you are. I regret what I did, but it was the only way I knew of -"

"What, to prevent me from being with Gendry? What about Gendry, Jon? He must be worried sick about me, thinking the worst has happened, and whatever you think, or feel, know that I do care for him -"

He thrust his face down so close to hers she could feel his breath against her lips. The heat fell off of her in waves and she thought she was sweating; she felt his anger, madness, and frustration, and his love and lust. It was in his eyes and she clenched her jaw, resisting an urge to kiss him through her own anger. It did nothing for her body's confused state or her conflicted emotions, but when he growled, low and feral, she reacted.

"You had little thought for Gendry when my tongue was fucking your wet cunt."

BAM! Arya's free arm pulled back and delivered a fisted punch into Jon's jaw, enough to make him stumble back several paces hitting the table and chair set, sprawling into it and making an awful racket. It was enough time for Arya to unlock the door and race out, her hand killing yet inexplicably she was so turned on. Damn her traitor body to the Seven Hells. The noise brought Podrick out of the next room, a scared expression on his face, his mouth half-opened. She wasn't surprised to see him, really. Jon needed help spiriting her out of Storm's End. Other passengers turned around curiously but went on their merry way.

"Milady -"

"Don't fucking Milady me, Pod. Give me Needle. And my dagger!"

Probably knowing it was unwise to protest, Podrick let her in the room, smaller than hers, running to the corner where Needle lay sheathed, picking it up and her dagger, shakily handing her both.

"Mila - Arya, what -"

"I am getting off this fucking ship if I have to swim. You are coming with me. And anyone who tries to stop me -" She shoved her dagger into the side of her boot and unsheathed Needle - "Will get stuck with this fucking pointy end."

Jon came racing in the room, stopped suddenly by Arya's sword pointed into his chest.

"Get out of my way." She felt dizzy, uneven. She wore she could feel sweat trickling off her forehead. "I won't hesitate, Jon."

"I know you won't. Arya, please." His angry, feral, sexual state had left him, leaving only a contrite, cautious Jon again. Getting punched in the face might do that to a person, thought Arya viciously.

"I said -" She paused, her hand wavering on Needle.

"Arya?" Jon's voice sounded so distant. "Arya!"

Sweat trickled down her neck, her breasts, feeling like spiders crawling across her skin. She stared at Jon and Needle dropped from her grasp, clanging to the floor, and she felt herself pitching forward, straight into Jon's arms. Then, there was nothing but darkness.

Chapter End Notes
I know it was a longer wait than usual... I apologize. I want to say thank you to everyone reading and a thank you for the comments and support. It means a lot to me and I am humbled at the response I have received! Thank you!!!

And a special shout-out to hellastella, I hope you like this, it's the least I can do, congratulations!
Jon dragged the cool rag once again over Arya's forehead, followed by his fingers brushing back each strand of dark hair that clung stubbornly to her skin. Podrick had just brought in a fresh bucket of the seawater before scurrying back to his room. He had to make do, as there was no ice upon the ship. Thankfully the waters were still cool from the years of being frozen.

"Do you remember that spring when you were so sick," he whispered, the strain of the past couple of days causing his voice to crack. "Your mother gave you milk of the poppy to help you sleep and though it did, it made you even more ill? The Maester on the ship confirmed you don't have the fever illness, Arya, thanks to the gods."

Guilt gnawed away at him as she looked up at him with her dark grey eyes, so much like his own yet so much more full of storms and fire and life. She has not said one word to him since she came to; not one word. He propped her up so she could drink, wiped her down with a cool cloth, rearranged her covers to make her more comfortable, and she remained passive and silent, very much un-Arya like. Yet her eyes conveyed everything. She was still angry, understandably so, but there was also a softness there, as if the past day of lying in bed with him hovering over her and talking aimlessly gave her some understanding of what he did and why he did it; at least, he hoped so.

He had been terrified. He, who had seen and done so much, he who feared nothing anymore, knew nothing but fear when she had pitched forward into his arms. Pod had taken off like lightning; whether it was to scour for a Maester on board or to flee for his life, Jon at first wasn't quite certain. Thankfully there was a maester to return with, an elderly man who Jon shadowed as he examined Arya. He didn't care for a stranger touching her, assessing her, but when it was determined she did not have the fever illness. Jon could have kissed the man then, but the reality was that the drug had affected her, the drug he procured and plotted and executed to give to her. All his life he wanted nothing but Arya to be protected and loved, yet lately it seemed all he was doing was hurting her, from the moment he entered her and spilled his seed during his illness to now. The past day had given him time to reflect, to reconcile in his heart that he was doing her more harm than good.

The best intentions in the worst of actions.

He loved her. *Gods, he loved her.* But at what cost? He refused to let her run into the arms of another man, but would he want her with him this way? As much as it hurt, maybe he should let her return to Gendry, if that was what she wanted. He could not - would not - keep her against her will, and yet that was exactly what he did when he spirited her out of Storm's End, even if he tried to rationalize it by recalling she told him she missed Winterfell at the celebration banquet. If she wanted to be with him, then he needed to let her make the choice on her own. He knew that now after it was too late. He took away her ability to choose and for that he was now contrite. He didn't understand the tumultuous feelings inside of him, the emotions that spurred him to be something he was not Or was that who he was? *Was it a fight against his nature, or was it his nature exposed?*

Gently he placed the rag in the little bucket by his feet and pushed it aside, twisting in his chair before reaching to hold her left hand, pale and limp in his. She didn't snatch it back; that was something, at least, as she turned her head to stare at him. *Through him.* Daringly, he brought her hand to his lips for a feather-light kiss, which wasn't rejected. Relief overwhelmed him.

"Arya, I am so sorry. I promise you now, no more. Just say the words, and I will send another raven
to Storm's End announcing your return." Somewhere deep down, his heart screamed at him. *No, do not give her up. Do not give in.* He tried to ignore it. "I was wrong to do what I did. I just didn't want to see you marry Gendry, but I hurt you. And I am sorry."

She leaned over and reached up with her other to caress where she had hit him, touching his bruised jaw. Jon drew in a breath at the feel of her and froze, waiting.

"And I am sorry for *this,*" she finally whispered. "Well, *partly.*"

He smiled; she sounded so much like herself just then.

"I deserved it. You always did deliver a good sound hit, even as a little girl." His abused flesh already missed her touch when she withdrew. "Remember the time I jokingly stole the cherry tart from you after supper, and you chased me around? You gave me a good right hook after you knocked me over with a broom."

"I remember. The tart went flying and I was so mad because it was ruined. I jumped on you and showed you -*"

"*Just how serious losing dessert was.*" They finished the sentence in unison. Jon's heart swelled at that. It had always been this way in the past: saying things together, at the same time. As if they shared the same mind, the same feelings. It felt strange and familiar at the same time to look back at them, as they were; brother and sister, best of friends. "It didn't hurt, well, maybe it stung a little. I deserved it then, too."

"But you made it up to me by giving me your all your desserts for the next month." A slight smile formed on her small and beautiful mouth. "And I knew you only meant to play around. I just overreacted."

"You weren't overreacting this time, Arya. I deserved it and more. I'm sorry. I know you are angry and I cannot blame you for that. If I could take it back, I would -*"

"Really? You would take back talking to me about your tongue in my cunt?"

His body unwillingly jolted at her words and he damned it while trying to ignore it. He had never heard her use that word before and to use it so casually in that soft voice...immediately he was flustered.

"Uh, Arya, that's not what -*"

"I *know* what you meant, Jon." She raised her thick eyebrows. "We need to work on your ability to suss out joking. You have always been such a brooding boy. And anyway, I haven't just suddenly forgiven you. You are as broody as I am bad at letting things go. You made a confused situation worse, only it's not just our feelings at stake."

"I'll do whatever it takes to earn forgiveness, and earn back your trust. Even if it means attending a wedding ceremony I'd rather die than witness." As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he cringed.

"You make it sound like I would be marrying a Ramsay Bolton or a Joffrey Baratheon. It's Gendry. He is a good man. You know this. I would be loved and cherished -*"

"Aye, he *is* a good man. Handsome and the King, strong and built, and he adores you." He cut her off, not able to help the jealousy that seemed to jump out of nowhere and take over. "And I would suffer every night imagining him taking you over and over in the royal bed."
"Over and over? So you are saying you imagine Gendry is extremely virile as well as handsome and strong? Really, maybe you should be thinking about marrying the King."

"You must be feeling well, to tease like that." He kept his tone gentle but his ire was rising.

"Jon, I meant to talk to you about the last time I was with Gendry -"

"I think it was a bit obvious what your last meeting with him in his solar was all about. You can spare me the details. Besides, you need to rest more."

"Gendry knows about us, Jon. He knows I ran to Storm's End and to him after something happened between us. I didn't have to tell him; he just guessed. I don't think he could marry me now in good conscience. At least, not until he finds out you drugged and left with me being unwilling." She moved her hand over his and squeezed. "If you only would have asked me. If only you would have waited -"

"Waited for what? For you to eventually fuck him in his solar?" He tried to yank his hand away but she tightened her grip. "Wait for the royal announcement of your betrothal?" He was aware he sounded like a petulant child, but he didn't care.

"Why do you do this?" She sat up, her hair a mess flowing down around her shoulders, the cover falling to reveal her in her smallclothes, her eyes dark yet bright, boring into him and sparking something deep within. "You sweetly talk about our childhood, then growl at me, making assumptions?"

"Because I don't know your mind, Arya." He said it, finally. "I know you as a little girl. You came back to me a woman grown. A stranger. I cannot pretend to know your thoughts and feelings. You seem so unsure about them yourself."

"You only know me as a little girl?" Her eyes challenged him. "I would think you imagining me being fucked right and proper by Gendry or you shoving your tongue in my cunt says otherwise."

He sat, stunned, speechless. Just yesterday she hit him, was ready to stick him with Needle and now.. was the Maester so sure she didn't have the fever illness? He couldn't move as she released his hand, kicked off the rest of her covers, and started removing her smallclothes. It took her no time at all to shuck out of them and toss them to the floor.

"Arya." He dragged his sight away from her naked body to study the rag in the bucket on the floor. There was a fire in his belly and a tightness in his groin. He could not trust himself to look upon her and not want her.

He heard her sigh but he still averted his gaze.

"You took no issue with my body when you fucked me senseless. Or when you tore my dress in your desire to strip me of it to leave me bare to give me pleasure like I'd never experienced. You know I am a woman grown, no little girl. Are you disgusted by it? My body?"

"Never," he growled, low and assertive. His downcast eyes spotted her narrow, small feet dangling near the floor as she had swung herself to sit at the edge of the bed.

"Then why won't you look at me?" Her leg reached out so she could poke one of those feet at his shin. "Why won't you - oh."

Her words weakened when he left his chair to kneel on the floor in front of her, taking her foot into his hands, lifting it to his cheek. He looked up at her then to drink her in appreciatively. Her eyes
were round, luminous; her mouth slack, slightly opened; her hair was a disheveled mess falling down around her small, perfect breasts and covering the dark-tipped nipples. He noticed her taut stomach clenching while trying to not let his stare transfix on the dark thatch of hair between her shapely legs. Her arms were tense at her sides, touching her curvy hips, hands digging into the mattress. Reverently, he leaned into her foot to plant kisses on the side. Her skin was smooth.

"I love you, Arya. Yes, you are a woman." He allowed his free hand to skim up her raised leg, only to stop at her inner thigh. "I know I lack a poet's words, which is what you deserve, but you are beautiful. The only reason I cannot look at you is for want. Need."

Jon didn't wait for a reply before scooting forward to rain kisses from her foot up to her thigh, gently licking and biting his way up, stopping only when he moved close enough for his head to rest on the edge of the bed, bumping into her center. He could hear her whimper a little at that; her breathing increasing. The warmth rolled off of her as he moved to give her other foot and leg the same attention. Her flesh there was creamy and pliant, as soft as her center. He felt himself becoming hard, straining against his breeches, and it took all of his will to not give in to the fiery passion building in him.

"Jon." She exhaled his name, and it was the sweetest sound.

He leaned up into the bed then, pressing into her, pushing her down while scooting her up so both of them were lying twisted in the bed, and she pulled him down to her, hands on his shoulders, before she started unbuttoning his tunic. He meant to help her but decided her lips were more important as he sought them out, finding them already begging for his touch. Determined to kiss her slow, he was met with an urgency from her, and he surrendered, weaving his hands in her hair. His tunic was unbuttoned now; he had no smallclothes underneath and he felt his hands brushing over his chest before attempting to pull it off of him. His hands left her tangled strands to help, and it was quickly discarded, leaving him to meet bare chest to bare chest while tongue met tongue. He sank into the unsatisfied pleasure of feeling her hardened nipples pressed into his chest, before she reached down to fumble with the laces on his breeches. He broke away from their kisses.

"Arya -Arya -wait," he rasped, backing away from her. It was overwhelming, this feeling. Was he going to make love to her? Did she want this? He looked down at her and she reached up, determined, her fingers nimbly returning to work his laces. Reaching down, he grasped her hand to still it, and she boldly caressed his erection in response.

"Jon. I want this."

"Arya, I -" He searched for words and found none to speak as his mind raced. His body ached for her and moved of its own volition as he backed off of the bed to remove his breeches and boots himself under her watchful gaze. For the first time since standing up in bath he was completely exposed to her. For a moment he wondered if she would be repulsed by all of his scars, by his mangled warrior's body and all the blemishes, but she sat up and reached for him and he dove thankfully into her arms, once again savoring her lips. Only this time their bodies touched with no barriers between them and he nearly wept into her inviting skin as he made his way down her neck, feeling her hands on his shoulders, his back, up again to his neck, and up into his hair. She was everywhere, touching what she could, alternately moaning and whimpering, but he was far more greedy as he tried to go slowly down the length of her body, his hands trembling as they snaked down her sides, smoothing over her rib cage and stopping at her hips. She knew what he wanted and she parted her legs for him when he reached below her belly. His hand dipped down before his mouth did to slide along her folds; she was already sodden and swollen where he touched her. Gently he stroked her, moving his fingers up and down before circling her clit. He could smell her arousal and it awakened something feral in him as he dipped two fingers inside and stopped as he
heard her cry out softly. He couldn't stop the growl coming from his throat as he spoke.

"You've mentioned my tongue in your cunt twice. I take it you want it there now?" He already knew the answer, but he wanted to hear it from her. He felt her squirm and whimper at his words and his boldness suddenly left him.

"Yes," she moaned, low and deep. He felt her hands reaching the top of his head to clutch at his curls, to brazenly push his head down, and he needed no other encouragement than that.

Dipping down, he took a drawn-out, loving taste of her as he licked through her crevices, his fingers starting to slowly move inside her, curling in a come-hither motion. Her walls were soft and wet and warm as he sucked her clit between long licks. He felt her buck her hips into him and she was nearing a peak, he could tell. He stopped, withdrawing his fingers and replacing his tongue. It was different this time. She even tasted different - better, if that was possible - and now he could take his time, not have to worry about being missed, or someone interrupting. Knowing this, he set a languid pace, almost lazy and teasing, his fingers on her clit following suit. Her body responded, trying to entreat him to go faster by the sway of her hips and the jerk of her legs, but he was not to be deterred. He could tongue-fuck her like this all night if he wanted, and he could think of nothing better than tasting her until morning.

Arya cried out and groaned in frustration, writhing up into him, her arms thrashing into the mattress.

"Jon, please! Jon -ah, please!" She was begging so sweetly he had to quicken his pace while his fingers did the same. But it wasn't his mouth she was wanting. "Please, Jon, make love to me. I want to feel you inside me. Please -"

Jon withdrew from her, allowing himself one more taste as he licked upwards, moving past her mound up to her belly button, swirling his tongue around it and moving up, up, around her ribs, up to her breasts, kissing both tenderly before sucking her nipples, up further still to sink into her neck, breathing and tasting her salty sweat. She was like a vine with her legs and arms wrapping around him, her body arching into his, inviting him in. Still he resisted, kissing up to her wet, already kiss-swollen mouth to hungrily taste her again, while his hand slipped down between them to seek out her clit again, slick with her secretions and his saliva as he stroked.

"Arya." He spoke between kisses. "Are you sure?" He felt her arms wrap around his neck. "We can stop. I can still pleasure you -"

"I said, make love to me." Her words were whispered but he heard a demand, not a request. The was nothing more to be said as his fingers picked up their pacing, and when he heard her rasping become high and fast, he knew she was close to peaking. His hand left her to guide himself to her entrance and he hesitated for a moment.

"Arya." He stared intently into her eyes, dark orbs of desire that matched his own. She was beautiful. She was his. He wanted to say something flowery, something romantic as he nudged just the very tip of him into her tight warmth, but he could think of nothing but one thing as she gasped and smiled under him, her nails digging into his neck.

"I love you." As he whispered it, so did she at the very same moment; their declaration suspended in the air around them, sealing their fate as they looked into each others' eyes.

"Arya." He relished her name as it fell from his lips. "We say things together, speaking them in unison. It is us, who we are. But now I want us to come together, Arya."

He carefully pushed the rest of the way inside of her, her moans sounding strangled as she threw her
head back into the pillow, her neck arched forward. Fully sheathed, he struggled for control as he moved, gently rocking, his thrusts tempered by love and longing. He leaned into her to kiss her neck, feeling her legs tighten around his waist, her hands now grasping at this shoulders. Again her hips bucked upwards and this time he moved at her will, giving in to what she wanted, increasing the speed and force of this thrusts. Her hips only moved faster, her head whipping up, and he met her lips again with his. This time they were fierce with passion and love and lust, driving each other to their climax. Jon let go of all restraint, losing himself in the love of his life, the only woman he ever truly loved. The only woman he would defy duty or honor or life to be with.

"Jon, Jon, I love you. I do. I love you. I'm -" Her voice hitched, her breath increasing. She was sticky with sweat from the both of them, her hair dampening to his touch.

"I know, I know, my Arya. My love." He moved his pelvis to override her, his cock angled just right to cause friction on her clit. He felt her tightening and let his own release happen as she pulsed around him, her nails raking down his back as her sharp cries of affirmation drowned out his own moan of her name as his seed spilled into her. He fell against her softly and she clung to him all the harder while he peppered kisses on her cheek, forehead, eyelids, and nose, before drawing her in for a feather-light kiss.

"Arya." He swallowed hard, searching her face. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Yes, I am. I - I love you, Jon." Her voice was as tender as he had ever heard it. Gratefully, his little kisses resumed down her neck to her breasts, licking the sweat glistening between them before enclosing his lips on each nipple. The taste and feel of her was enough for him to maintain his erection, still buried deep inside of her.

"I love you, too, Arya. I will never love another." He felt her hands snake through his hair to twist and play with his curls. It made him harden even more inside of her.

"Jon -I can feel you hard inside me. Isn't it supposed to go soft?"

He smiled into her breast.

"A man can keep hard if he stays aroused, I think. I suppose most men just let themselves go limp so they can sleep."

"Hmm. You know I'm still angry with you, right?" She spoke hazily, as if she was already drowsy. "I should probably make you do this for me every day for a month, to make up for it. You know, like the tart destruction."

Jon popped his head up at that, seeing her smiling down at him. All seriousness, he thrust his cock deep within her, finding her barrier, and she sucked her breath in, biting her lip.

"Ah." She gasped. "Ah."

"Did that hurt? Are you -"

"No, it didn't hurt me. I'm not a maiden, Jon, you know that full well. You've already opened me up. It just feels so good...I feel so full. You go so deep. I want you to do it again."

"You are the Lady of Winterfell, I am yours to command." He caught her smirk before he drew back and sank deep again, bringing forth more sounds. "As for making me do this everyday for a month -"

"Mmm. Yes?" She almost purred and he stilled inside of her, cupping her face in his hands to stare into her. She raised her eyebrows, silently questioning, her eyes also inquiring.
"Make me do this every day for the rest of our lives. Marry me, Arya. Be my Queen and my wife, my love." The words fell from him as easily as he started to move inside of her again. "Come with me back to Winterfell and be with me."

She closed her eyes, her lips wanton and parted.

"Oh gods, Jon."

It was all she said, but it was enough for him for now as he crashed his lips down on hers. She flung her arms around his neck, pulling him into her even closer.

This was his home, his life, his love. *Arya.*

Chapter End Notes

I hope this wasn't too much for everyone. I figured after 15 chapters, it was time they made love. Personally, this is the only "boat sex" I want. :) Thanks for reading! :)
Home Again

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Home.

Arya could think of only one other time when she was so relieved to reach Winterfell, and that was her arrival after all of her years abroad. She tried not to think of it, a happier time when Bran and Sansa were alive, but the memories flooded her. She remembered not just the joy and relief, but the disappointment that Jon had not been there. At that time she wondered if she would ever see him alive again.

She, Jon, and Pod made their way through the courtyard, dismounting. Their furs had long been discarded and slung over the horses. Once they had reached land, they were amazed at the green grass and warmer temperatures. It had been several years since anything had grown or not been saturated with snow and ice. Now, everything was in bloom and they were all comfortable in just their regular clothing. They had been dreaming of a spring for so long, and now it was finally upon them, even up here in the North. The first thing Arya was determined to do was bathe and dress in a fresh gown. Jon had packed incredibly light when they had left Storm's End, which meant she had very few changing options abroad.

Brienne approached with Tormond and Satin flanking her. Arya smiled at the tall, formidable woman and friend. They had formed a bond immediately when Arya had returned to Winterfell, the past lack of trust forgotten. Both had recognized the warrior strength and independence in the other. There was also the relatable scars of being teased in the past for their looks and less than 'ladylike' behaviors. Yet now, both of them were respected and, as Arya observed Tormund and Pod's reactions, they were also loved by good men. Not that it defined who they were, but it enhanced them all the same. In their lifetime, what they both had experienced could have easily hardened them beyond all redemption, but it only made them stronger and more adaptable.

"Lady Brienne." It was Podrick who spoke first, almost reverently as he bowed his head to her, his soft brown eyes not leaving her face. Brienne for her part smiled and moved to embrace him. Arya, as tired and emotionally drained she was, did not miss the intimacy in the hug, the warm expression on Pod's face, or the stiffening stance of Tormund. She smiled at that.

Her smiled faded when she felt Jon's eyes upon her. Ever since they left the ship, he had said very little to her and only seemed to look at her when she thought her gaze fell elsewhere. She ached to take his hand in hers, but instead she moved further away from him.

"Lady Brienne, Tormund, Satin. It's good to be home." She cleared her throat as their horses were led away. "It seems we've been gone forever. I'd love to go over any news or happenings but first we are in desperate need of baths and a dinner."

She was able to hug Brienne, comforted by the woman's warmth, before entering the castle. It was good to be home, and it would be even better to be back in her solar. She missed the Godswood, Ghost, Brienne, her rooms, and perhaps most of all, the crypts.

"We are glad your journey was a safe one, my Lady." Brienne walked beside her, confident, while the men fell behind them. "I trust the King was pleased with your visit."

Arya noted the formality and firmness in Brienne's tone and the meaning behind it. She knew
something. She swallowed before answering. Jon and Pod turned down the hall to follow Tormund into the Great Hall, but Brienne kept beside her as she made her way to her room.

"He was. I would have stayed longer but I missed Winterfell." It was true. She wasn't lying at that.

"As we have missed you and Jon. The North doesn't seem the same without its Lord and Lady. Winterfell seems empty without you both." Arya caught the emphasis.

"I do believe Podrick has missed being here." Arya could not help the mischievous tone. "Ser Jaime asked about you."

"And how is Ser Jaime?" Brienne side-glanced, her expression not so stoic. "Does he fare well at Storm's End?"

"He has sprouted more grey, but is well enough. Maybe now that the weather has improved, he will make his way up North for a visit."

Brienne said nothing, stopping with Arya near her solar, but Arya knew where Brienne's heart truly lay. It was not here in Winterfell with Tormund. She retained a solid friendship with the ginger Wildling, perhaps she had formed an affection for him and maybe they even fucked. It was probably pleasant enough for her, but Jaime was who she truly wanted. Arya had seen Jaime enough to know he loved Brienne as well, and wondered why the damn fool just didn't give up the Kingsguard to be with her. It wasn't like Gendry wouldn't be sympathetic and relieve him of his lifelong commitment. Her own heart went out to Brienne. After all, was she not finding herself in a similar situation?

If only their gods and the Crown would accept polygamous marriages. If only the Targaryen ways would be embraced; if a man could have multiple wives, why could a woman not have multiple husbands? Brienne could have Jaime and Tormund, and even Podrick if she so chose to, and maybe she would marry both Jon and Gendry... Arya shook her head to rid it of the insane thought, but it lingered, and she gave it a name: wishful thinking. Then again, it seemed she couldn't handle one man right now, let alone two.

"Is there anything you need, Arya? I've already sent for a bath to be drawn and fresh clothing laid out. Dinner is already cooking. I assume Jon is being briefed now on affairs, but if you'd rather attend it, I can -" "

"No. Thank you. I am tired from traveling and have no wish to hear the yammering of men."
Although, she would not have minded if Jon would yammer to her directly and tell her what in seven hells was going on with him. "I missed you, Brienne. You are family."

"As I missed you." Brienne smiled then, making her soft. "I need a formidable sparring parter again."

"Well, you have two. I admit my fighting skills are a bit lacking. I'm sure Podrick wouldn't mind having a go. Or two. Or three."

"Um, Milady -"

"I'm teasing, Brienne. Thank you, I'll go ahead with my bath and join everyone for dinner. As I said, it's good to be home. After dinner I'd like to visit the crypts and spend some time in the Godswood."

Brienne bowed, a small smile on her face as she pivoted and strode confidently away, her boots creating soft thuds down the hall.

Arya walked into her solar, finding a place to nestle Needle and her dagger before stripping down to her small clothes and sitting at her mirror while servants dragged in a tub basin to fill for her bath.
She brushed out her ratty hair until it crackled, hanging straight past her breasts, remembering a time where her hair was cut short. It had been so easy to manage then, so easy when her life had been so hard. Was it truly reversed now? The wars were over but now it seemed battles of the heart replaced the bloody fighting, and the loss of life was now someone having to lose at love. Again she thought of Brienne, a skilled knight and fierce fighter, reduced to a love triangle and sparring to vent frustrations.

Arya sighed, placing the brush down. Her bath was nearly ready when Ghost padded into the room straight to her. Even sitting on his haunches he towered over her, waiting patiently for some loving, which she happily bestowed. She wished Nymeria was more tame, like Ghost, but she understood Nymeria ran with her own pack. Sometimes, though, she came to Arya when she was out in the forest. She never strayed much from the North and Winterfell anymore, not like she used to.

"Hey, boy. I missed you, too." Gratefully she buried her face into his thick white fur. He was quiet, patient, protective; and he felt good. Much like his owner. She could smell Jon on him, as of course Ghost must have begged for Jon to love on him, too. She smiled, knowing full well he did not lack for petting and attention while they were gone. He was a favorite with everyone, especially the Wildling children.

The bath was ready and Arya shooed Ghost out. She really didn't want an audience when she stripped and sank into the warm tub, even if it was just a direwolf. Her solitude also gave her a chance to be completely alone with her thoughts for the first time since leaving Storm's End.

Naturally her mind flitted back to the night with Jon on the ship. It was all she could think about since it happened. The night they made love for the first time - well, they made love twice that night-it seemed like their relationship had changed. It wasn't the first time he had been inside her, but it was the first time she felt truly connected to him in a physical, sexual capacity. The emotional connection has been there since she was a child, but this adult expression of love and desire was a whole other sensation and it frightened her a little. Arya Stark was not scared of anything anymore except for this. She had been brought up through her childhood to believe Jon was her brother. The discovery of their true relation of being cousins did not wash away the mentality of their brother-sister bond, yet there was nothing sisterly in the way she felt for him now. Still, the morning after, she wondered if Jon had second thoughts about being inside her. He awoke almost awkwardly, pulling her close to him for a moment, their naked bodies pressed together under the covers, just before he nearly bolted from the bed to dress. He had kissed her tenderly but said he needed to return to the room he shared with Pod, for appearance's sake.

Since then he had not sought her out intimately.

Perhaps a man like Jon did not need sex or even want it so much. She knew of only the Wildling Ygritte as far as Jon's lovers were concerned. One woman over the course of nearly ten years? He said he never bedded Sansa, and she knew of no other woman in his life. As far as she knew he had taken no casual lover along the way. But the way he made love to her, the sweetness and intensity, how much he begged for her to marry him, and all his vows of wanting to do it to her every night for the rest of their lives...she knew he wanted more. Why didn't he seek her out for more? She could still hear his moans in her ears as if he was here in the tub with her now. Her heart quickened at the remembrance of his words, sensual and sexual, that tumbled from his lips. Did it mean anything to him? Was it all just something in the heat of the moment? Maybe she was just being overly shameless and brazen in her desire to have him inside of her again while he was trying to be considerate and a gentleman with her.

She hurriedly washed her hair, trying to clean out the thoughts in her head. Sloshing around in the water, which was quickly turning murky (much like her train of thought), she used her cloth to scrub
her body raw. Traveling always made her feel filthy now. Before, when she was younger, she cared nothing for baths. Rather, she got one when she could get one, but didn't overly worry about how long she had to go without. It was different now.

*Everything was different now.*

Making love had changed everything. Jon was different now. Then again, so was she. The difference between them was that Jon had known what he wanted when he buried himself inside her, when he cried out his declarations in the heat of their passion, while she remained silent in response to his pleadings. She tried not to parse apart why she avoided acquiescing to his demands to be with him, marry him, but it was glaringly obvious and she knew it. It had less to do with some lingering resentment over him drugging her and more to do with the reason for the said drugging.

Even as she wished he would try to lure her into bed again, she made no attempt to demand why he had not and did not attempt to try her hand at seducing him first. Deep down it hurt her, felt like a rejection, but at the same time she wondered if perhaps he was feeling rejected as well. There had been no time to talk it out, either, since they reached land and traveled up to Winterfell. Podrick had always been with them, making their conversations superficial. At the time Arya wasn't concerned over it, and was thankful for a third party, and it wasn't just because of a perceived rift between her and Jon.

*There was someone else on her mind other than Jon.*

She thought the bath would clear her head but it only served to muddle it more. Sighing, she arose from the tub, drying off as quickly as possible before slipping into fresh small clothes. They smelled like the earth and home, and lethargy overcame her. However, there was something she needed to take care of, and there was still dinner to attend before she could rest. She skimmed over to her desk and slid herself into her chair, retrieving parchment from the drawer. A new quill and fresh ink had been provided as her bath was being made. Arya would be seeking out a raven before she attended dinner.

She immediately began to write.

Chapter End Notes

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It's been awhile, I am sorry for the slow update.
I know this chapter isn't exciting, but I wanted to show a small homecoming scene and a little bit of Arya's relationship with Brienne and their similarities.
Next chapter, I promise, will be... Jonrya. ;)
"Where has Lady Arya gone?" Jon's voice was low and threatening, and just loud enough to be heard over the clanking of swords.

Podrick and Brienne halted their sparring to look at him as if he were a man deranged, and perhaps he was. He glared at Podrick, who immediately dropped his gaze to the ground. Pod had not been comfortable around him since the drugging of Arya and Jon could not blame him for that. Brienne tilted her head up, her eyebrows raised quizzically. Both had a sheen of sweat from their exertion, no doubt due to the armor they wore. It was indeed spring and neither of them was used to the unusual warmer temperatures. Jon stood in only a simple grey shirt and breeches and felt warm himself.

"The last I saw of Milady, she was with Ghost. Headed towards the Godswood." Brienne nodded to the scroll clutched and crumpled in his fisted hand. "Not good news, I presume?"

"Depends on the reader," Jon replied abruptly, turning to take his leave, his boots heavily plodding in the dirt. His free hand instinctively sought Longclaw at his side but came up empty-handed. He had left it in his solar and he felt naked and vulnerable without it. Even now he walked with a cautious step, as if an enemy would suddenly jump out of nowhere to attack him. It was borne out of all the years of fighting and the betrayals.

Ghost. He had not been much of a companion since he had arrived home, preferring to pad around following Arya's every move. It made him jealous to know his own wolf preferred someone else, and it made him even more jealous to see Arya fawning over him, petting and hugging him when the occasion seemed to warrant it. At night Ghost was nowhere to be seen, and Jon knew he preferred to sleep in Arya's room, no doubt being invited to take up most of her bed.

_It should be him in her bed, not Ghost._

Ever since they arrived back home Arya has avoided being alone with him and he at first did not understand why. He thought everything had been sorted out when they had made love and affirmed their feelings for each other but he had been sorely mistaken. She was as distant as she had been when she returned to ask his approval for her marriage to Gendry. It was as if nothing between then and now had happened and his frustration was boiling to a point of exploding. Arya was pleasant enough, discussing domestic matters with him, supping with him in the Great Hall and sometimes even hunting with him, but never were they alone. He had knocked on her solar door a few times only to be met with a stony silence. He wondered if there was some resentment lingering over her drugging but he never had a chance to ask. Always she had someone in attendance beside her and he wondered if it was deliberate. Granted, he thought giving her space and freedom would help her calm down over the events since leaving Storm's End, but that did not mean she had unspoken permission to go out of her way to avoid him.

He never understood women. He thought he understood Arya, thought they always held a special connection since childhood, but obviously he was wrong and it hurt him to be treated this way. They had made love on the ship and it was the most intimate and powerful thing he had ever experienced. He thought she had felt the same way. What was the difference between them now? Why did she avoid him like he was the fever illness? He wanted to breach the gulf between them, bewildered by her actions.
Well, he understood her actions now.

Approaching the Godswood, his eyes took her in from afar. She was sitting underneath the weirwood tree sharpening Needle while Ghost lay next to her. She was dressed in nothing more than a corset and breeches with boots. A cloak lay crumpled on her other side. Her head was bent, her dark plaited hair hanging over one shoulder. She looked both fierce and beautiful, and Jon nearly tossed his letter into the waters before them. He would love nothing more than to take her in his arms and lie under the tree. But the paper felt heavy in his hand.

Ghost noticed him first and stood majestically in greeting, sauntering over to him obligingly. Arya looked up at this sudden movement but then glanced down and did not stop sharpening her sword. She offered no greeting, either.

"Hey boy." Jon scratched his direwolf affectionately. "Go."

Ghost obeyed his command and bounded off deeper into the woods. Jon immediately regretted sending him off, as he would have made a great buffer or tension breaker. But Jon didn't need something to hide behind; if he could face the Night King in one-on-one combat, he could very well handle one petite woman. Even if it was Arya.

"Arya." He meant his tone to be curt but it came out soft.

"Jon."

He could see the whites of her knuckles from the sword and the stone.

"Arya, I need to speak with you."

"I'm readying to hunt. Can it not wait?"

Inwardly he flinched, even as heat was rising up the back of his neck. Only Arya could raise his ire just be a simple question. In the past few years he always thought he was dead to emotion, dead to feeling anything but the need to survive. He was not the same man he was before his deaths; it was as if pieces of who he was had splintered and drifted away, leaving him with more a shell and less of substance. Yet Arya could make him feel again. She always had that power over him, always brought out his best - and sometimes worst - of emotions and actions. Even now, standing before her, he didn't know if he wanted to beg her to be with him or throw the letter at her and walk away in anger.

"No, it cannot wait."

She finally stopped sharpening and looked up at him, her dark grey eyes stormy and her small mouth turned in a frown. In seconds she gracefully stood to face him, tossing her braid over her back. Her stance was something of defiance and Jon could see the slim muscles flex in her arms. She jerked her chin up.

"Well? What is it?"

Slowly, deliberately, Jon raised his hand to wave the paper before handing it to her.

"Do you want to explain this?"

Gingerly she plucked if from his hand and started to read. Jon knew the words my heart as he read it a million times in his solar before deciding to confront her over it.
My Lady Stark,
I hold your letter to my heart and I accept your request, I will be arriving as soon as haste allows. It is good to know you are safe and at home. We have much to discuss and I hope to leave Winterfell with resolutions and a new beginning.
Yours,
King Gendry Baratheon, First Of His Name

Jon watched her face but it settled into an impassive expression. It was rare for Arya to not show her emotions. The only change was the darkening of her eyes.

"How long have you had this?" Arya flipped the parchment over to examine the broken seal and her name scrawled on the back.

Jon clenched his fists to his side. Her tone was accusatory. Unbelievable.

"Long enough to guess if the King is traveling by land, he should be arriving very soon."

"This was addressed to me, not you. How did it come to be opened by your hands and not mine?"

"I am the Lord Of Winterfell. Warden of the North. King In The North still, by the Northern view. Any correspondence coming into Winterfell goes through me first. As should all outgoing, but I see you have gone behind my back to conspire with your lover." The words tumbled out even as Jon did not mean to say them. "I did not ask for or consent to the King's visit."

"He is the King, he can go wherever he wants." She shrugged, as if it was of no consequence. Anger started to build in him.

"That is not the issue, Arya, and you know it."

"No. I suppose the issue is you drugging me and taking me against my will from the King's home, when said King had us both there due to a consideration of a marriage proposal. I am righting the wrong, Jon."

"By inviting the King to our home and to your bed?" He bit the words out, staring at her as a wolf does prey. She remained annoyingly calm, seemingly uncaring. "Arya, did what happened on the ship mean anything to you at all?"

"I could ask you the same thing." Her tone was even but she took a step backwards, closer to the tree, clutching the letter.

"How much more clear could I be, Arya? I asked you to be my wife. I told you I wanted you in my bed every day for the rest of our lives. How could you not understand that? I told you my intentions - "

"Yes, said in the heat of the moment when you were buried inside of me. I hear quite a few men tend to make empty declarations when they are rutting."

"I am not rutting you now. And I say I want you, Arya. I always have." Love and longing and anger intermingled with his words.

"Fine show of it, with you running out of my room on the ship and keeping your distance ever
"Arya. Don't make this about me. This is about you inviting the King behind my back. What are your intentions with him? Do you plan to marry him here in the Godswood?"

"Marry. Marriage. Man and wife. Everyone is placing so much importance of love and unions these days. I would rather fight more wights and kill more enemies than handle one more moment of this."

"I'm sorry if my love is such a burden for you to bear." He stepped closer and she stepped back, bumping up against the tree. They were so close face each other that Jon could feel her breath. She leaned against the Weirwood as if for support, as if merely talking about his love for her drained her. He stared into her, trying to decipher her emotions from her eyes. "And I do love you, Arya. You belong with me."

"I belong with no one." There was fire in her eyes then. "I do as I please and I refuse to be a brood mare or any man's servant."

"Then why this?" Jon gestured at the parchment. "Why, Arya? Leave him be, let him marry Manderly's wild child or the highly revered Lady Mormont, if your excuse is that he needs a Northern alliance. Why go behind my back like this? Do I not deserve a common respect, do I mean anything to you? Do I just stand idle and do nothing while you fall into the King's bed?"

"I never said I asked him to come for a marriage. I asked him to come to sit with the nobles and hold council to quell any unrest -" she began, swallowing nervously.

"That is something I should arrange, or at least be made aware of. You would not hesitate to tell me of your plans and you know I would set it in motion. You deliberately went behind my back because you feel guilt over Gendry, don't you?"

"No." Her voice was weak and he knew she was lying to him. "I of course added that I had returned to Winterfell and begged an audience with him when he arrives. You have drawn your own conclusions over its meaning."

"Begged an audience? Arya Stark never begs." He leaned in closer, resting his left hand against the tree. She did not shrink from him but he heard her breath catch and the paper crinkle. His right hand caught hers and he yanked the letter from her, throwing it to the ground. "Not publicly, anyway. Aye, I seem to recall some sweet begging from you in bed on the ship."

He didn't know why he taunted her, baited her her anger. He only knew he had a taste of her, a feel of her, a moment with her that had shown him what he had been missing all of his life. He knew there was a madness in him and that madness was both ignited and quelled with Arya. His life had come full circle. He no longer felt deadened to the world, no longer felt that all he was doing was surviving. With Arya he knew he had peace, even as she stood before him evoking emotional chaos. A chaos he welcomed. Beautiful, fiery Arya.

He wasn't expecting the slap he received.

It stung, not so much on his face but in his heart. Her eyes were furious and her chest heaved, and he meant to ask her why in Seven Hells she smashed him, but the words didn't come. Desire, love, frustration and need came over him instead. All of which he had buried deep down inside since they left the ship. Buried to give Arya time. Time for what? For her to write a secret letter to Gendry? To deceive him?

"Arya," he growled.
Jon felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as he reached for her, pulling her to him for a kiss, his mouth immediately seeking hers, finding no resistance. He was dreading rejection, scared of her responding, desperate to be close to her. Trying to fend off any prospect of her moving away, he shoved her up against the tree while his tongue found hers waiting for him. The blood rushed in his head and down through his cock as he pressed into her, his mouth moving from hers to bite at her throat and exposed shoulders, his hands clumsily reaching up to unlace the front of her bodice, pushing it to the sides to cup her bared breasts. Lips met hardened nipples as he licked, bringing forth soft sighs and moans from the only woman he loved, the only woman he wanted. Arya. His Arya.

Sure she would not pull away from him now, Jon continued his attentions, intermittently nipping and sucking, while his hands sought out the laces on her breeches. He felt her shaking hands weaving into his curls, holding him to her bosom as she arched into him. He groaned into her nipple when he was able to slide his hand down underneath the cotton fabric to discover she wore no smallclothes. He barely touched her mound of soft curls before shoving two fingers down her folds and then inside her. She was already wet and her warmth and whimpering set him into a frenzy as he fucked her relentlessly with his fingers, his thumb stroking her slippery clit. She was soft and hard and pliant and resistant, her thighs tensing, squeezing together on his hand. Her hands fingers dug into his shoulders on his tunic and he could feel her nails as if he wore nothing at all.

Jon moved his head up to devour her but she turned her face to the side, scraping up against the tree with every thrust of his hand and body. He settled for her neck, licking the sheen of sweat there but only for a moment before dropping to his knees, withdrawing his fingers to grab her breeches with both hands to yank them down to her ankles. He looked up at her; she was gasping in soft cries now, her head still turned and her eyes shut, her arms spread as if grappling for purchase on the smooth weirwood behind her. She looked completely debauched, her bodice completely open and her pants around her ankles, her breasts heaving, the veins in her neck pulsating. Not bothering with removing her clothing, he reinserted his fingers, slower this time, and crouched into her to take long, heated licks. She tasted like salt and earth and sweets and he moved his hands to part her legs as far as they could go with the restricting breeches locking her ankles.

From the distance, a wolf howled into the stillness.

Arya turned her head forward, her eyes popping open. She squeezed her legs together and used her hands to shove Jon away. He stumbled back a bit, caught off guard.

"Nymeria," she gasped, trying to regulate her breathing.

Jon looked up at her incredulously. So Nymeria was close, what did it matter? He had his tongue on her clit and his fingers in her cunt, and she abandoned her pleasure over her direwolf? Combined with her perfidy with Gendry, Jon's anger was rising again. She still refused to look at him, reaching down to pull up her breeches. A few seconds later another howl carried in the wind: Ghost.

"Something is going on." Arya fumbled with her corset, trying to lace it up with shaking fingers. "There's a disturbance."

Jon cursed and stood up. Arya was always in tune to Nymeria when she was close. Jon had lost the sense of Ghost after his second death. His wolf was still connected to him, Ghost was still his, but the ability to connect to him in a mystic way was gone. Perhaps he felt a little envious, but right now he was cockblocked by a howl and he was not happy about it. He had craved Arya for several weeks and had not so much as touched her.

Arya still did not meet his eyes, choosing instead to look out towards the woods, as if she could actually see through the trees.
"It is two direwolves howling. What of it?" He couldn't keep the annoyance out of his voice as he inadvertently rolled his tongue around in his mouth, savoring the taste of her.

Before she could answer, a horn heralded, faint but distinguishable. Jon recognized it. The King's herald. Gendry was approaching. Finally Arya met his eyes and he saw guilt flash in them for a moment and he stared at her in disbelief, feeling the heat rising within his head. She was feeling guilty for what they were doing, with Gendry so close. Arya was flustered enough to forget her breeches weren't laced all the way and she abandoned Needle and her cloak as she turned away from him, making her way back to the castle.

Not a word. Not a sorry, not an I love you, nothing. She was walking away from him like he was nothing so she could prepare to greet Gendry.

No.

Wordlessly he ran to her, turning her around to face him, crushing to him, an arm around her while his other hand held her head to him for a brutal, demanding kiss. This time she struggled, biting his lower lip as hard as she could, breaking skin and drawing blood. It inflamed him and hurt him and it pained him worse when she shoved him away, turning to run. Determined, he grabbed her by her svelte waist and she reared back as he lunged forward, tumbling both of them to the ground, Arya diving nearly face first into the grass beside the pond. She didn't scream or kick when he toppled onto her, and didn't struggle as Jon blindly hoisted her hips up, grasping at her breeches - loosened by the untied strings - and pulling them down to her knees. It took only seconds for him to loosen his own strings to free his straining cock, and even less time to enter her from behind. Jon groaned in twisted pleasure and Arya clawed at the ground, her low moan signaling to Jon she wanted this. Still, he needed to be sure.

"Do you want this, Arya? Do you want me to fuck you like the wild wolf you are? Like Ghost mounts Nymeria, when she sees fit to come around?" He wasn't certain of it, but he imagined it to be true.

Arya whined, almost wolf-like, and backed into him.

It was all he needed as he began to thrust, gripping her hips so hard he knew bruises would be left, reminders of him loving her. He wanted to take his time, make love to her under the weirwood tree and savor every part of her, but this was her doing, there was no other choice to be had. It was here, now, quick and painful and heartbreaking. He didn't know if she would stay with him or if she would choose Gendry. He only had now, buried in her wet heat, rutting her like the wolves they were. He was a wolf, not a dragon. Wolf mates with wolf, it was destined for them. Gendry was no wolf, only a stag. He was not worthy of someone as wild and free as Arya, even as Jon wanted to keep her captive and caged by his side.

Arya pushed back to take him deeper and he let go, thrusting into her madly. He leaned in, crushing her, one arm snaking around to pinch and stroke at her swollen nub as he bit into her shoulder, her neck. Marking her. Claiming her. Her whimpers and his grunts filled his ears and he hoped all of Winterfell could hear them. Let them all know, the surviving wolves of Winterfell were mating.

Without warning he felt her constricting around his cock and he felt her shudder, but she refused to cry out her release, and it spurred something in him. She was denying him her pleasure. There was only one reason for that and it was riding into Winterfell. Angrily, carelessly, he reared up and his thrusts became even more harsh and he left her sensitive clit to dig both sets of fingers into her hips, snapping against them, and she whimpered, low and muffled, strangling cries in her throat.

"Arya, my Queen. My Wolf Queen." He growled his declaration, dizzy with lust and love and
possession. "Arya, Arya, my Arya - help me -" He threw his head back as he came hard inside of her, his mouth opened but soundless, filling up her womb with his seed. His pulses were quick in succession and the euphoria was nothing like he had ever experienced before.

"Arya," he whispered, panting, coming down from his elevated state. He moved to embrace her from behind but she quickly disengaged herself from him, the slick, sucking noise signaling a new arousal in him, as well as the sight of her bare arse and his seed leaking out of her well-fucked and still swollen cunt. It was a sight quickly covered when Arya nearly jumped to her feet, her back towards him, pulling up her breeches and tying the laces this time. She seemed a little unsteady and shame instantly filled him. He had been rough with her, maybe too rough, and though she had not protested, he couldn't help but remember back to the night he stole her maidenhead.

"Arya." He whispered her name again, standing with her, hastily tucked himself back in and lacing up his own breeches. "Arya, please -"

She did not turn around, did not speak. Rather, she did the worst thing she could have done to him, and started running towards the castle.

Rather than pursue her or watch her go, Jon closed his eyes, trying to catch his breath.

What had he done?

He turned around and faced the weirwood tree, the only witness to their heated coupling. It was then that he had noticed she had left her cloak - and Needle - behind.

Chapter End Notes

I know it has been over a month, and I apologize! I blame the show and the terrible season for my lack of motivation for Jonrya. However, I re-read some passages in the books that were Jonrya-centric and I decided it was time to finish this little fic. Thank you so much to everyone for the outstanding support on my first Jonrya fic, I appreciate all the kudos and comments, they really do encourage me. 2 chapters to go....
The Great Hall was bare, save for the long tables and chairs. Tapers were lit to brighten the room but the light did not extend to the two men on opposite ends of the main table. Arya sat at the middle section, an even amount of distance between them. There was no offering of food or ale or wine on the table and the only sound was the impatient tapping of Gendry's fingers.

Arya's eyes darted from Gendry, looking resplendent in his black and gold kingly attire complete with a defiant crown, then over to Jon, dressed simply in his grey tunic and breeches, his hair tied back in true Stark style. Neither men had said a word as they were seated, even as they both stared each other down before turning their gaze onto her.

It had been hours since Gendry arrived into Winterfell, his usual jovial personality replaced with a barely-concealed anger towards Jon that Arya could not miss. Oh, he was pleasant enough greeting her, a warm smile being offered as well as a ceremonious kiss to her cheek and hand, but any happiness at seeing her faded when Jon came forward as Lord to greet his King. Jon's bow was as curt as he dared, as was Gendry's nod. Arya's heart broke at that. Since Jon had first met Gendry they had become fast friends and allies; the guilt overrode her knowing she was the cause of this rift between them. Supping with them, even with everyone else in the room, had been a tense affair.

She supposed it hadn't helped matters that she had little time to clean herself up for Gendry's arrival. There was no time, either, for her to linger on what had happened in the Godswood, even as the ache and leaking between her thighs were distinct reminders. She was able to wipe down a bit before scrambling into a simple grey cotton gown that laced up the front and hastily brushing her hair so it flowed straight down her back. She didn't bother with a servant so it was an awkward affair but she looked presentable enough. She wondered how many times she had looked at her reflection over the past few months to make sure she had no markings and almost laughed. She would have laughed, had there been anything funny about it.

She wanted what happened in the Godswood, couldn't deny it was fierce and erotic when Jon had made love to her as wolf does with his mate. It seemed natural, mystical even, as if they really were Nymeria and Ghost. It was a different feeling of pleasure; it was deeper, more primal, and she felt even more connected to him than any time on the ship. Truly in that moment, she felt something she never had felt before: belonging. They were wolves. Jon was a wolf, not a dragon, no matter who his actual father was. Perhaps Aunt Lyanna was the stronger of the two when she mated with Aegon. After all, dragons were no more once again, yet there were still direwolves still roaming, hunting, breeding.

Arya glanced at Jon, catching his stony stare. A muscle worked in his cheek yet his eyes softened a little with love and lust. He may be angry that he was sitting here in silence with his King and rival for her affections, but that did not stop him from looking at her as if he would love nothing better than to throw her upon the table and have her right there in front of Gendry. Gendry's eyes were roaming over the hall and he coughed, an echo filling the room.

"So, Arry, what exactly are we waiting on? Ser Davos? Ser Jaime? Any one of the numerous Lords and Ladies that have yet to arrive?" Gendry's slightly strained voice broke the stillness, and Arya didn't know if she was glad for it or not.

"No, actually, it is just us." Arya dragged her eyes away from a surprised Jon to meet Gendry's questioning eyes and raised eyebrows. "I was just testing the waters. To make sure you two were able to sit with civility before I begin."
She had lured Gendry to Winterfell with a proposed meeting of the northern nobles, but Arya sent no other ravens and she had no intention of doing so. It was deceptive but the only way to make sure Gendry came to Winterfell without having a sole intention of fighting Jon over what had happened at Storm’s End. She knew Gendry would not hesitate to come, and come he did, but with a smaller than expected retinue. It was not safe for the King to be traveling abroad for so long without men in numbers in case of an ambush, something Gendry had not yet learned in his few years of kingship. Still a blacksmith at heart, she mused, yet a more fair and honest King there never was.

"Arry -"

"Please. You both know I am not here to make long speeches or engage in any dramatic episodes." Arya kept her hands in fists underneath the table in her lap. "I only wish to mend whatever is broken between the two of you. As King and Lord of Winterfell, Warden of the North, you both need to work together and maintain a strong alliance. Up until now it has been friendly. The Northern Nobles will always grumble no matter who is King. If Jon were to claim his birthright, they would complain he was too much of a Targ and he abandoned the North. Gendry will always be the bastard King, even though he was legitimized. Yet let us be honest, the North’s population was decimated in the Great War and Long Night, so their grumblings will be just that. They will never have the numbers to form a successful rebellion, especially with Gendry having won over the common folk and the Wildlings."

She turned towards Gendry.

"You make a good King, Gendry. A fair and lovable one. You rely too much on Ser Davos for guidance, but you are still a young king learning the craft. I cannot see that you are too unhappy with your destiny, and I see no reason for things to change."

Gendry opened his mouth to say something but was cut off when she turned to Jon.

"All your life you wanted to be Lord of Winterfell. I knew it and knew you meant no disrespect to Robb over it, or Bran, or Rickon. I know you dreamed of being lord and having children of you own. Yet your path was one of a warrior, a fighter, a savior of our world. I believe you are still struggling to find a place but you know for certain a Kingship is not a title you want."

Arya stood up, the chair scraping against the floor. She placed her hands on the table to steady herself before she continued.

"My King, we have been good friends and I love you. I know my actions of late have been unfair and I am sorry for it, but I cannot marry you. I believe we are matched well as friends and allies but not as a man and wife. I’m afraid I would be more detrimental to you and the crown if I was your queen. I’ve already thrown my support behind a royal marriage with any Northern bride. It would quell talks of rebellion and I know all Northern ladies are quite strong and smart. It is what Kings do, and no doubt you will be a good husband."

She did not miss how Gendry's face fell, and it slashed at her heart but she refused to be swayed by it. He bowed his head and said nothing. Turning to Jon, she saw the hope in his eyes, and she drew a breath.

"Jon, there is much between us, and I love you as well. But at this time, I will marry no one. I am no one’s, and I do not believe it is the destiny for either of us. We are the last of the Starks, and I believe the lineage will end as such. I am not a good fit for Lady of Winterfell, no more than you are for King." She read defeat and desire in his eyes before they darkened into... what, she did not know. Or she would rather not know. But he said nothing, same as Gendry, but he did not bow his head in silent acquiescence.
It did not matter if he accepted her choice or not.

"I am now leaving you two alone to mend this thing between you two. It is late in the evening and I am retiring. Talk through the entire night if needs be, and I will break my fast with you both in the morning."

She forced herself to back away from her seat and leave the Hall without looking back, closing the doors softly behind her.
It was still night but nearing a hint of an oncoming dawn when Arya slipped quietly out of her solar, Ghost padding behind her, his low whine echoing in the hall. She smoothed a hand over his fur to placate him but she knew it was a futile effort; the white direwolf was connected to her and there was no doubt he sensed her intentions as he nuzzled her to turn direction, to her right, towards Jon's solar. She had hoped Ghost would have opted for Jon's company tonight and should have known better.

"Shhh," she admonished. "Quiet." She afforded a quick glance down the way and heard nothing but Ghost's breathing.

Her satchel was flung over her left shoulder, dagger at her belted waist. She abandoned her grey dress for her breeches and boots, a dark brown cloak donning her shoulders and the hood encasing her face. Her hair had been hastily tied back in a messy plait and she wore a small wolf pendant at her throat, given to her by Jon after they settled back into a nearly decimated Winterfell after the Great War. She touched it reflectively, remembering the reconstruction that had taken place in the bitter cold, with Gendry and Jon working side-by-side. She hoped their talks after she left had been a step in the right direction to set them back together as friends; if not friends, at least allies.

They would break their fast together in the Great Hall, but she would not be there to witness it. Stealthily making her way down the corridor, she was intent on her destination with Ghost trailing hesitantly when she rounded the corner and nearly collided with Brienne. Arya looked up in surprise at her. She had never seen the tall, formidable woman without her armor. Yet here she was, clad in a loose blouse and butternut breeches, her blonde hair tousled and her bright eyes widening in shock.

"Milady," she managed to whisper, running a hand through her hair to make it look less messed, "What are you doing up at this late hour?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Arya whispered back, nodding her head towards the solar where she knew Ser Jaime was sleeping as their guest. "But I already know so there is no point in either of us discussing reasons."

"You're leaving." The blush that had formed in Brienne's cheeks in the torch lights faded and seemed to drain from her face. "You are leaving Winterfell."

Arya pleaded with her eyes and said nothing. Ghost sat on his haunches, still taller than Arya, and cocked his head. Brienne sighed in understanding and sadness.

"Milady, I would ask you to stay but it is not my place. Yes, I have sworn to protect you until the end of my days, but you must make your own choices. I can only ask that you do not stay away too long. Winterfell needs you."

"Winterfell is managed quite well, between you and Jon, and yes, Tormund and Podrick. I think it can survive without me for awhile."

"And what about Jon?" Brienne met her eyes boldly. "He doesn't know of this does he?"

"No, and neither does the King." Arya slipped a hand in her cloak and brought forth two letters. "I meant to leave these on the study desk, where Jon goes through his daily briefings. But here. I know
you will ensure they reach Jon and Gendry."

"Milady -"

"Call me Arya."

Arya was pleasantly surprised when Brienne gingerly accepted the letters and pulled her into a hug. It was warm and good and felt almost motherly to her. For a moment she thought of her own mother, dead before her time. Just like Robb, Bran, Rickon, Sansa, Father. So much death. She was numb to it now but she still longed for a long-ago time when all of them were happy, living together in Winterfell, before King Robert came calling to demand Father become his Hand. It was a memory but a faded one, as if it was someone else's happy childhood and she had no childhood. She only knew of Arya, and of the fighting and killing and the loss of so many friends and family. Lady Arya Stark of Winterfell never felt truly like her. There was something missing, and she didn't even know what that was.

She allowed herself to relax into the strong woman's arms, hugging her back before pulling away gently and smiling. Brienne smiled back, and Arya realized how radiant she could be.

"If I had a daughter, I imagine she would be very much like you, Arya. I wish you happiness and good fortune in your travels, but remember Winterfell is your home."

Arya could only nod and motion to Ghost.

"Please take Ghost, Ghost, stay." He obeyed, so much unlike Nymeria, and Arya embraced him, burying her face into his massive fur. "Take care of Jon, and actually sleep in his room sometimes."

Without another word and not looking back, Arya stole down the length of the corridor, her feet silent and light. In no time she swept past the guards with a brisk "Night Hunting" order for them to open the gates. It was not unheard of for her to hunt at night, although she usually had Ghost accompany her. She didn't need an excuse to go about her business anyway; she was Lady Arya Stark of Winterfell, and her reputation as an adept assassin was known and even feared. She usually didn't care but when it worked in her favor she was not one to hesitate to use her brutal past.

Instead of making her way to the stables for her horse, she turned in the other direction and headed to the Godswood. She knew she had left Needle behind in her lust and confusion and shock, and she was going to retrieve it before leaving. It was the first time she had ever been neglectful of her only prized possession and she felt as if she had abandoned her own babe in the woods, but she dared not leave to find it until she knew Gendry and Jon were at a point where they would at least not kill each other. She had waited, pacing in her rooms, until she heard Jon's footsteps at nearly midnight sauntering down the hall. He had paused by her door and she had drawn in her breath, waiting for a knock, but he continued on, and she didn't know whether to feel relief or offense. Gendry did not seek her out either. Arya finally decided relief was the emotion to feel; there were no angry stomps or raised voices. Their talk must have been a good one.

The night-near-dawn was a beautiful one, the moon full and bright. All around the silence floated on the leaves of the trees swaying in a soft spring breeze. Arya could almost feel the stillness wafting over her, the only sounds some distant chirping of a feathered animal. The Godswood never failed to calm her and even though she followed no gods anymore - not even the god of Death - this is where she felt the most spiritual, the most moved. Not even the crypts held this sense of belonging, even though she could spend hours down there, surrounded by her family's bones and cold stone statues.

She approached the dark pond, nearing the Weirwood, trying not to recall what transpired not even a half-day before. Even now in the moonlight she could see where she had clawed madly in the dirt,
biting her lip to prevent a cry of pleasure from escaping her lips, in fear someone might hear. Fear
that Jon might hear and know how he had that power over her; a power she was leaving to prevent it
from taking over her life and his. She loved Jon, always had, always would. But this form of love
was something foreign to her, something both dark and light and comforting and painful. She didn't
want their love to bring down a Kingdom, didn't want their newfound passion for each other to tear a
united country in half. The time of the Stag and The Dragon warring had passed. Gendry would not
be doomed to repeat his father's destructive, unrequited love and Jon would not be cursed to repeat
his father's madness and passion for a girl he had to defy everyone to have.

By the time Winterfell's guests woke from their slumber, she would be well on her way. to where,
she wasn't sure. Bravvos? The Faceless Men were no more, but perhaps something else could be
found there. Mereen? Essos? Perhaps Dorne, where Tyrion Lannister now resided. He had always
wanted of a vineyard and now the weather there would prove fruitful for his dream. In spite of
herself, a small smile formed. She could drink wine with Tyron and listen to his bad jokes.

Determined, she neared to the Weirwood tree and exhaled a disappointed, deflated sigh. Needle was
not where she had left it. The stone she had used to sharpen it was, but Needle was not there next to
it. Jon must have picked it up while she was running like a coward to make herself presentable for
Gendry's kingly arrival. She did not want to travel without Needle but she loathed the thought of
walking back to the castle to find it. Especially if Jon had it in his solar, which she was certain of. She
could easily sneak in without him knowing - a learned attribute when she trained - but her path was
set. She would make do with her dagger and buy a sword at the soonest opportunity.

But it was Needle. An extension of herself. Needle was her identity. Without it, she was truly No
One. All of a sudden she felt empty; lost.

She heard Nymeria's distinct howl and she closed her eyes. Her direwolf was close. Maybe she
could run into the woods and find her, see if she was running with her pack and join them. She
would like to be as free as Nymeria and yet she knew she would never be. She never really was.
Always bound by revenge or justice or survival, she had never been truly free, had she?
Yes, she had been free. Her heart and her mind and her body had all been free.

Behind the darkness of her lids, her eyes saw the light.

She could smell him before she could hear him. The scent of worn leather, sandalwood, death and
rebirth.

"You forgot something." The low, husky tone caressed her ears as she felt his breath near her cheek.
Heat radiated from behind her while a right arm snaked around. Opening her eyes she saw Needle,
polished and gleaming in the moonlight, offered to her from a scarred but strong, firm hand.

Ghost bounded past and into the woods, a flash of while before he disappeared.

Arya stood, frozen for a moment.

"Go on, take it. I have one of my own, my love."

She slowly turned to face him.

He was cloaked as she was, encased in black, a burlap bag strapped over his shoulder and Longclaw
at his side. The light caught the side of his face and illuminated his scar near his dark grey eyes. She
saw the love there that she knew she could seek and always find. Love now tempered with passion.
His mouth curled in a small but unsure smile, his lips parting.
"Jon."

It was all she could whisper out before she reached up and cupped his face into her hands, bringing him down for a slow, sweet kiss. He gasped into her mouth, dropping Needle to the ground to embrace her.

Sealing their fate, they heard Ghost and Nymeria's howl of approval from deep within the woods.

Chapter End Notes

The End.

I want to thank everyone for the kudos and comments and overwhelming support on my one and only Jonrya full-length fic. This originally started as a one-shot idea, then a ficlet, then maybe several chapters... then it morphed into a 20 chapter fic.

Thank you to those who supported me, and who continued to support me when some of the Jonrya fandom displayed - and still displays - very polarizing and non-supportive behaviors and odd jealousies/competitions. I hate to say it, but the Jonrya (and Robbrya) writing fandom has been the most toxic I have ever been in, and that is really saying something since I originally entered the shipping world by first reading a Jonsa fic.

Now that I have even more limited writing time, I am concentrating on only what I feel passionately about and Jonrya isn't it. I feel I did quite well with The Difference Between Us and anything else would not have the same quality. I know I was trying to write a sequel to this, but now it's been scrapped. Thank you! -- 4/28/2019

End Notes

Title is from the song "The Difference Between Us" by The Dead Weather. I heard this and it immediately put me in the mind of Jon & Arya. Ergo, this creation just popped into my head and wouldn't go away... so I need to write it out.

Find me on Tumblr under SoHereWeAre1

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!