

## Rattle the Cage

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/34362511) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/34362511>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Game of Thrones (TV)</a> , <a href="#">A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Arya Stark/Gendry Waters</a> , <a href="#">Arya Stark &amp; Gendry Waters</a> , <a href="#">Arya Stark &amp; Sansa Stark</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Arya Stark</a> , <a href="#">Sansa Stark</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Marriage Proposal</a> , <a href="#">Self-Reflection</a> , <a href="#">Family</a> , <a href="#">Sister-Sister Relationship</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence</a> , <a href="#">Episode: s08e04 The Last of the Starks</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of <a href="#">A collection of my GOT fanfics</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">Anonymous</a>
Stats:	Published: 2021-10-08 Words: 1,516 Chapters: 1/1

# Rattle the Cage

by Anonymous

## Summary

In the hours following Gendry's failed proposal, Sansa and Arya have a conversation.

## Notes

This is an AU, though having only read GOT fan fiction myself, I'm not sure just how much it deviates from the television show or novel timeline. I did do some quick research to try to make the canon elements as accurate as possible, but please forgive any errors.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

## **Rattle the Cage**

Sansa met her on the battlements.

Arya had practiced with her bow until the muscles in her arms had begun to burn - though it still hadn't felt like enough - and then her feet had carried her here without a thought, far away from the crowds and the noise of the ongoing celebration.

She wasn't sure how her sister had known where she was, but with Gendry's proposal still ringing in her ears and her chest aching hollowly, she didn't care enough to press Sansa for answers. Not now.

It was something to consider later.

When Sansa reached her side, she didn't speak immediately; instead, her eyes, like Arya's, were locked on the snowy, white landscape that stretched around the castle for miles.

Perhaps Sansa wanted her to speak first. If she did, she would be disappointed, though Arya watched her from the corner of her eye, studying her sister's profile. She still wore the dress she had chosen for the feast, but now a cloak was wrapped around her shoulders, thick fur trimming the edges, the fine wool trailing down to her ankles.

Arya couldn't begin to guess what Sansa was thinking. They had never been close as children, and they had fought so fiercely. But, they had loved each other nonetheless – even if, once, they might have both argued the opposite.

Now...now, though they had begun to learn about one another again, Arya could say that she did not truly know her sister. Gone was the haughty but smiling girl who'd dreamed of castles and princes and true love; outwardly, at least, Sansa had become as cold as the North of their birth.

They both had, Arya knew.

But where Arya was a deadly frost, the sort that came without warning, killing quickly, Sansa was the frigid bite in the air that could cost a man his fingers if he wasn't wary...or lull him into his final rest with a false feeling of warmth.

Looking at her sister was, Arya supposed, like looking at a familiar stranger...one bound to her by blood, and one whom she still loved, certainly, but so much about her was foreign now.

She wondered if Sansa felt the same about her.

“Have you been out here long?” Sansa asked, turning to look at her at last.

Arya shrugged in answer.

“I thought you might be with your smith,” Sansa added. “I saw him leave the feast.”

Arya felt a muscle tick along her jaw. Before the Battle of Winterfell, Sansa had noticed her frequent visits to the forge, and hoping to close some of the distance between them, Arya had told her about Gendry. About how they'd met. The King's Road. Harrenhal. The Brotherhood, and how they had been separated.

She had not told her everything, but given Sansa's insistence on calling Gendry "her smith," Arya was sure that she had put many of the pieces together for herself.

"My smith?" Arya repeated flatly. "You mean Lord Baratheon."

"He told you."

"He did." Arya hesitated, that hollow ache in her chest burning for a moment, the way her arms had burned after hours of practicing with her bow. "He asked me to marry him."

Sansa smiled in delighted surprise, and for an instant, Arya saw a glimpse of the sister she had known before, the one who'd reveled in all those songs and stories. "Really?"

"I said no."

The smile faded, and a frown flickered over Sansa's face. "Why?"

"He asked me to be his Lady."

"Is that all?"

"It's enough."

Her sister watched her for a long moment, a furrow between her brows. Gradually, the now-familiar mask Sansa seemed to prefer descended over her features.

"Well," she said at last, "I believe Lord Baratheon was quite deep in his cups when he left the feast. You may want to give him a chance to make his case when he is sober."

"It wouldn't make any difference."

"Are you sure?"

Arya turned to stare at her sister with narrowed eyes.

"Why are you defending him? Why does it matter to you what my answer was?"

"Because I care about you."

Arya did not doubt the truth of that, but she knew there was more to it, and she wasn't in the mood for the games Sansa played. After a moment's consideration, she could think of only one reason for Sansa's interest.

"You want to ensure that Gendry is loyal to the North in the future."

Sansa dipped her head in acknowledgment. “Daenerys had a reason for legitimizing him, and it wasn't altruism. Besides, the Stormlands may be in disarray right now, but if they can be successfully rallied, they'll be useful allies.” She paused, glancing back at the white landscape before them. “And,” she added more quietly, “I want my sister to be happy. One of us should be.”

Arya blew out a harsh breath, irritated. “Forget your plans, whatever they are. I said no. I can't be something I'm not. And I'm not a Lady.”

To her surprise, Sansa she smiled faintly, shaking her head. “I can't believe you're still so insistent about that, even after all these years.”

Arya's eyebrows rose in disbelief. “I've served as your executioner. Hardly lady-like.”

“I've passed the sentence. Meting out justice is a Lady's duty as well. So is protecting the small folk and seeing that their needs are met.”

“You know as well as I – better, perhaps – that few would define a Lady's duty that way.”

“How would your *smith* define it? How would *you* define it?” Sansa pressed. “It is a title, Arya. Make it mean whatever you wish. What is to stop you?”

Arya grit her teeth. Sansa was only saying that because she was so keen on an alliance with Gendry – and what better alliance than marriage? A marriage that, for all she knew, her sister would have opposed if Gendry hadn't been legitimized. But things were different now.

Gendry had been born into the game, in a way, given that Robert Baratheon was his father, but with Daenerys's declaration, he was a much more valuable piece on the board.

Of course Sansa knew that. Of course she saw the advantages that Arya's ties to Gendry could give her.

Arya should have expected this sooner.

“I won't be bartered, Sansa,” she said lowly. “I'll fight for you, I'll kill for you, but I won't marry someone at your behest...not even Gendry.”

Sansa was studying her now, calculation and curiosity in her gaze.

“The way you spoke when you told me about him...you seemed to care about him deeply.”

Arya wondered if Sansa meant that to sound like an accusation – perhaps Sansa hoped the guilt might be enough to sway her.

It wasn't.

But that did not mean Arya didn't feel it. She hadn't wished to hurt him...but she had. And she would have only hurt him again if she'd said yes. (She wondered, sometimes, if she even remembered how to do anything else.)

“I *do* care about him. I always will. But I told you – I can't be something I'm not.”

A line reappeared between Sansa's brows. "You act as though being a Lady is a cage you must escape from."

"It is. I want no part of it and never have."

"And that includes your smith."

The words made Arya flinch faintly, and a denial was on the tip of her tongue before she could stop it, though it didn't escape her lips.

Sansa saw it, and Arya hated the triumphant gleam that was now in her sister's eyes.

"Is it that you don't want him, or that you don't think you *should* want him?"

Arya didn't answer.

Sansa seemed to take that as some sort of confirmation and drew herself up, every inch the Lady of Winterfell.

"Alright," she said simply. "You're not a Lady. But don't define yourself solely by who you feel you *should* be, whether or not it makes you happy, whether or not it's actually what you want." She gave an elegant shrug. "If you don't love him, if you think you'd be miserable being married to him, fine. If you refused him only because accepting his proposal wouldn't match the rules you've concocted for what it means to be *Arya*, then all you've done is create a different sort of cage for yourself. And I don't know about you, but I've had enough of cages to last a lifetime. I'll not be put in another – not even one of my own making."

Sansa watched her for a long moment, then apparently satisfied that she had made her point, she turned and walked away without another word, her cloak billowing behind her, the sound of her footsteps a steady, unhurried cadence that echoed in the quiet.

(Later, much later, when Arya stood on the deck of her ship, staring out at the point where the waves met the sky, she tried to forget her sister's words and let herself wonder, for just an instant, why she felt trapped on the open sea.)

**Fin**

## End Notes

Thank you for reading! I would love to know what you think.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!