

BRAN

The Karstarks came in on a cold windy morning, bringing three hundred horsemen and near two thousand foot from their castle at Karhold. The steel points of their pikes winked in the pale sunlight as the column approached. A man went before them, pounding out a slow, deep-throated marching rhythm on a drum that was bigger than he was, *boom, boom, boom*.

Bran watched them come from a guard turret atop the outer wall, peering through Maester Luwin's bronze far-eye while perched on Hodor's shoulders. Lord Rickard himself led them, his sons Harrion and Eddard and Torrhen riding beside him beneath night-black banners emblazoned with the white sunburst of their House. Old Nan said they had Stark blood in them, going back hundreds of years, but they did not look like Starks to Bran. They were big men, and fierce, faces covered with thick beards, hair worn loose past the shoulders. Their cloaks were made of skins, the pelts of bear and seal and wolf.

They were the last, he knew. The other lords were already here, with their hosts. Bran yearned to ride out among them, to see the winter houses full to bursting, the jostling crowds in the market square every morning, the streets rutted and torn by wheel and hoof. But Robb had forbidden him to leave the castle. "We have no men to spare to guard you," his brother had explained.

"I'll take Summer," Bran argued.

"Don't act the boy with me, Bran," Robb said. "You know better than that. Only two days ago one of Lord Bolton's men knifed one of Lord Cerwyn's at the Smoking Log. Our lady mother would skin me for a pelt if I let you put yourself at risk." He was using the voice of Robb the Lord when he said it; Bran knew that meant there was no appeal.

It was because of what had happened in the wolfswood, he knew. The memory still gave him bad dreams. He had been as helpless as a baby, no more able to defend himself than Rickon would have been. Less, even...

Rickon would have kicked them, at the least. It shamed him. He was only a few years younger than Robb; if his brother was almost a man grown, so was he. He should have been able to protect himself.

A year ago, *before*, he would have visited the town even if it meant climbing over the walls by himself. In those days he could run down stairs, get on and off his pony by himself, and wield a wooden sword good enough to knock Prince Tommen in the dirt. Now he could only watch, peering out through Maester Luwin's lens tube. The maester had taught him all the banners: the mailed fist of the Glovers, silver on scarlet; Lady Mormont's black bear; the hideous flayed man that went before Roose Bolton of the Dreadfort; a bull moose for the Hornwoods; a battle-axe for the Cerwyns; three sentinel trees for the Tallharts; and the fearsome sigil of House Umber, a roaring giant in shattered chains.

And soon enough he learned the faces too, when the lords and their sons and knights retainer came to Winterfell to feast. Even the Great Hall was not large enough to seat all of them at once, so Robb hosted each of the principal bannermen in turn. Bran was always given the place of honor at his brother's right hand. Some of the lords bannermen gave him queer hard stares as he sat there, as if they wondered by what right a green boy should be placed above them, and him a cripple too.

"How many is it now?" Bran asked Maester Luwin as Lord Karstark and his sons rode through the gates in the outer wall.

"Twelve thousand men, or near enough as makes no matter."

"How many knights?"

"Few enough," the maester said with a touch of impatience. "To be a knight, you must stand your vigil in a sept, and be anointed with the seven oils to consecrate your vows. In the north, only a few of the great houses worship the Seven. The rest honor the old gods, and name no knights... but those lords and their sons and sworn swords are no less fierce or loyal or honorable. A man's worth is not marked by a *ser* before his name. As I have told you a hundred times before."

"Still," said Bran, "how many knights?"

Maester Luwin sighed. “Three hundred, perhaps four... among three thousand armored lances who are not knights.”

“Lord Karstark is the last,” Bran said thoughtfully. “Robb will feast him tonight.”

“No doubt he will.”

“How long before... before they go?”

“He must march soon, or not at all,” Maester Luwin said. “The winter town is full to bursting, and this army of his will eat the countryside clean if it camps here much longer. Others are waiting to join him all along the kingsroad, barrow knights and crannogmen and the Lords Manderly and Flint. The fighting has begun in the riverlands, and your brother has many leagues to go.”

“I know.” Bran felt as miserable as he sounded. He handed the bronze tube back to the maester, and noticed how thin Luwin’s hair had grown on top. He could see the pink of scalp showing through. It felt queer to look down on him this way, when he’d spent his whole life looking up at him, but when you sat on Hodor’s back you looked down on everyone. “I don’t want to watch anymore. Hodor, take me back to the keep.”

“Hodor,” said Hodor.

Maester Luwin tucked the tube up his sleeve. “Bran, your lord brother will not have time to see you now. He must greet Lord Karstark and his sons and make them welcome.”

“I won’t trouble Robb. I want to visit the godswood.” He put his hand on Hodor’s shoulder. “Hodor.”

A series of chisel-cut handholds made a ladder in the granite of the tower’s inner wall. Hodor hummed tunelessly as he went down hand under hand, Bran bouncing against his back in the wicker seat that Maester Luwin had fashioned for him. Luwin had gotten the idea from the baskets the women used to carry firewood on their backs; after that it had been a simple matter of cutting legholes and attaching some new straps to spread Bran’s weight more evenly. It was not as good as riding Dancer, but there were places Dancer could not go, and this did not shame Bran the way it did

when Hodor carried him in his arms like a baby. Hodor seemed to like it too, though with Hodor it was hard to tell. The only tricky part was doors. Sometimes Hodor *forgot* that he had Bran on his back, and that could be painful when he went through a door.

For near a fortnight there had been so many comings and goings that Robb ordered both portcullises kept up and the drawbridge down between them, even in the dead of night. A long column of armored lancers was crossing the moat between the walls when Bran emerged from the tower; Karstark men, following their lords into the castle. They wore black iron halfhelms and black woolen cloaks patterned with the white sunburst. Hodor trotted along beside them, smiling to himself, his boots thudding against the wood of the drawbridge. The riders gave them queer looks as they went by, and once Bran heard someone guffaw. He refused to let it trouble him. “Men will look at you,” Maester Luwin had warned him the first time they had strapped the wicker basket around Hodor’s chest. “They will look, and they will talk, and some will mock you.” *Let them mock*, Bran thought. No one mocked him in his bedchamber, but he would not live his life in bed.

As they passed beneath the gatehouse portcullis, Bran put two fingers into his mouth and whistled. Summer came loping across the yard. Suddenly the Karstark lancers were fighting for control, as their horses rolled their eyes and whickered in dismay. One stallion reared, screaming, his rider cursing and hanging on desperately. The scent of the direwolves sent horses into a frenzy of fear if they were not accustomed to it, but they’d quiet soon enough once Summer was gone. “The godswood,” Bran reminded Hodor.

Even Winterfell itself was crowded. The yard rang to the sound of sword and axe, the rumble of wagons, and the barking of dogs. The armory doors were open, and Bran glimpsed Mikken at his forge, his hammer ringing as sweat dripped off his bare chest. Bran had never seen as many strangers in all his years, not even when King Robert had come to visit Father.

He tried not to flinch as Hodor ducked through a low door. They walked down a long dim hallway, Summer padding easily beside them. The wolf glanced up from time to time, eyes smoldering like liquid gold. Bran would have liked to touch him, but he was riding too high for his hand to reach.

The godswood was an island of peace in the sea of chaos that Winterfell had become. Hodor made his way through the dense stands of oak and ironwood and sentinels, to the still pool beside the heart tree. He stopped under the gnarled limbs of the weirwood, humming. Bran reached up over his head and pulled himself out of his seat, drawing the dead weight of his legs up through the holes in the wicker basket. He hung for a moment, dangling, the dark red leaves brushing against his face, until Hodor lifted him and lowered him to the smooth stone beside the water. “I want to be by myself for a while,” he said. “You go soak. Go to the pools.”

“Hodor.” Hodor stomped through the trees and vanished. Across the godswood, beneath the windows of the Guest House, an underground hot spring fed three small ponds. Steam rose from the water day and night, and the wall that loomed above was thick with moss. Hodor hated cold water, and would fight like a treed wildcat when threatened with soap, but he would happily immerse himself in the hottest pool and sit for hours, giving a loud burp to echo the spring whenever a bubble rose from the murky green depths to break upon the surface.

Summer lapped at the water and settled down at Bran’s side. He rubbed the wolf under the jaw, and for a moment boy and beast both felt at peace. Bran had always liked the godswood, even *before*, but of late he found himself drawn to it more and more. Even the heart tree no longer scared him the way it used to. The deep red eyes carved into the pale trunk still watched him, yet somehow he took comfort from that now. The gods were looking over him, he told himself; the old gods, gods of the Starks and the First Men and the children of the forest, his *father’s* gods. He felt safe in their sight, and the deep silence of the trees helped him think. Bran had been thinking a lot since his fall; thinking, and dreaming, and talking with the gods.

“Please make it so Robb won’t go away,” he prayed softly. He moved his hand through the cold water, sending ripples across the pool. “Please make him stay. Or if he has to go, bring him home safe, with Mother and Father and the girls. And make it... make it so Rickon understands.”

His baby brother had been wild as a winter storm since he learned Robb was riding off to war, weeping and angry by turns. He’d refused to eat, cried and screamed for most of a night, even punched Old Nan when she tried to sing him to sleep, and the next day he’d vanished. Robb had set half the castle searching for him, and when at last they’d found him down in the crypts, Rickon had slashed at them with a rusted iron sword he’d snatched from a dead king’s hand, and Shaggydog had come slaving out of the darkness like a green-eyed demon. The wolf was near as wild as Rickon; he’d bitten Gage on the arm and torn a chunk of flesh from Mikken’s thigh. It had taken Robb himself and Grey Wind to bring him to bay. Farlen had the black wolf chained up in the kennels now, and Rickon cried all the more for being without him.

Maester Luwin counseled Robb to remain at Winterfell, and Bran pleaded with him too, for his own sake as much as Rickon’s, but his brother only shook his head stubbornly and said, “I don’t want to go. I *have* to.”

It was only half a lie. Someone had to go, to hold the Neck and help the Tullys against the Lannisters, Bran could understand that, but it did not *have* to be Robb. His brother might have given the command to Hal Mollen or Theon Greyjoy, or to one of his lords bannermen. Maester Luwin urged him to do just that, but Robb would not hear of it. “My lord father would never have sent men off to die while he huddled like a craven behind the walls of Winterfell,” he said, all Robb the Lord.

Robb seemed half a stranger to Bran now, transformed, a lord in truth, though he had not yet seen his sixteenth name day. Even their father’s bannermen seemed to sense it. Many tried to test him, each in his own way. Roose Bolton and Robett Glover both demanded the honor of battle command, the first brusquely, the second with a smile and a jest. Stout, grey-haired Maege Mormont, dressed in mail like a man, told Robb bluntly that he was young enough to be her grandson, and had no business giving

her commands... but as it happened, she had a granddaughter she would be willing to have him marry. Soft-spoken Lord Cerwyn had actually brought his daughter with him, a plump, homely maid of thirty years who sat at her father's left hand and never lifted her eyes from her plate. Jovial Lord Hornwood had no daughters, but he did bring gifts, a horse one day, a haunch of venison the next, a silver-chased hunting horn the day after, and he asked nothing in return... nothing but a certain holdfast taken from his grandfather, and hunting rights north of a certain ridge, and leave to dam the White Knife, if it please the lord.

Robb answered each of them with cool courtesy, much as Father might have, and somehow he bent them to his will.

And when Lord Umber, who was called the Greatjon by his men and stood as tall as Hodor and twice as wide, threatened to take his forces home if he was placed behind the Hornwoods or the Cerwyns in the order of march, Robb told him he was welcome to do so. "And when we are done with the Lannisters," he promised, scratching Grey Wind behind the ear, "we will march back north, root you out of your keep, and hang you for an oathbreaker." Cursing, the Greatjon flung a flagon of ale into the fire and bellowed that Robb was so green he must piss grass. When Hallis Mollen moved to restrain him, he knocked him to the floor, kicked over a table, and unsheathed the biggest, ugliest greatsword that Bran had ever seen. All along the benches, his sons and brothers and sworn swords leapt to their feet, grabbing for their steel.

Yet Robb only said a quiet word, and in a snarl and the blink of an eye Lord Umber was on his back, his sword spinning on the floor three feet away and his hand dripping blood where Grey Wind had bitten off two fingers. "My lord father taught me that it was death to bare steel against your liege lord," Robb said, "but doubtless you only meant to cut my meat." Bran's bowels went to water as the Greatjon struggled to rise, sucking at the red stumps of fingers... but then, astonishingly, the huge man *laughed*. "Your meat," he roared, "is bloody *tough*."

And somehow after that the Greatjon became Robb's right hand, his staunchest champion, loudly telling all and sundry that the boy lord was a

Stark after all, and they'd damn well better bend their knees if they didn't fancy having them chewed off.

Yet that very night, his brother came to Bran's bedchamber pale and shaken, after the fires had burned low in the Great Hall. "I thought he was going to kill me," Robb confessed. "Did you see the way he threw down Hal, like he was no bigger than Rickon? Gods, I was so scared. And the Greatjon's not the worst of them, only the loudest. Lord Roose never says a word, he only looks at me, and all I can think of is that room they have in the Dreadfort, where the Boltons hang the skins of their enemies."

"That's just one of Old Nan's stories," Bran said. A note of doubt crept into his voice. "Isn't it?"

"I don't know." He gave a weary shake of his head. "Lord Cerwyn means to take his daughter south with us. To cook for him, he says. Theon is certain I'll find the girl in my bedroll one night. I wish... I wish Father was here..."

That was the one thing they could agree on, Bran and Rickon and Robb the Lord; they all wished Father was here. But Lord Eddard was a thousand leagues away, a captive in some dungeon, a hunted fugitive running for his life, or even dead. No one seemed to know for certain; every traveler told a different tale, each more terrifying than the last. The heads of Father's guardsmen were rotting on the walls of the Red Keep, impaled on spikes. King Robert was dead at Father's hands. The Baratheons had laid siege to King's Landing. Lord Eddard had fled south with the king's wicked brother Renly. Arya and Sansa had been murdered by the Hound. Mother had killed Tyrion the Imp and hung his body from the walls of Riverrun. Lord Tywin Lannister was marching on the Eyrie, burning and slaughtering as he went. One wine-sodden tale teller even claimed that Rhaegar Targaryen had returned from the dead and was marshaling a vast host of ancient heroes on Dragonstone to reclaim his father's throne.

When the raven came, bearing a letter marked with Father's own seal and written in Sansa's hand, the cruel truth seemed no less incredible. Bran would never forget the look on Robb's face as he stared at their sister's words. "She says Father conspired at treason with the king's brothers," he

read. “King Robert is dead, and Mother and I are summoned to the Red Keep to swear fealty to Joffrey. She says we must be loyal, and when she marries Joffrey she will plead with him to spare our lord father’s life.” His fingers closed into a fist, crushing Sansa’s letter between them. “And she says nothing of Arya, *nothing*, not so much as a word. Damn her! What’s wrong with the girl?”

Bran felt all cold inside. “She lost her wolf,” he said, weakly, remembering the day when four of his father’s guardsmen had returned from the south with Lady’s bones. Summer and Grey Wind and Shaggydog had begun to howl before they crossed the drawbridge, in voices drawn and desolate. Beneath the shadow of the First Keep was an ancient lichyard, its headstones spotted with pale lichen, where the old Kings of Winter had laid their faithful servants. It was there they buried Lady, while her brothers stalked between the graves like restless shadows. She had gone south, and only her bones had returned.

Their grandfather, old Lord Rickard, had gone as well, with his son Brandon who was Father’s brother, and two hundred of his best men. None had ever returned. And Father had gone south, with Arya and Sansa, and Jory and Hullen and Fat Tom and the rest, and later Mother and Ser Rodrik had gone, and *they* hadn’t come back either. And now Robb meant to go. Not to King’s Landing and not to swear fealty, but to Riverrun, with a sword in his hand. And if their lord father were truly a prisoner, that could mean his death for a certainty. It frightened Bran more than he could say.

“If Robb has to go, watch over him,” Bran entreated the old gods, as they watched him with the heart tree’s red eyes, “and watch over his men, Hal and Quent and the rest, and Lord Umber and Lady Mormont and the other lords. And Theon too, I suppose. Watch them and keep them safe, if it please you, gods. Help them defeat the Lannisters and save Father and bring them home.”

A faint wind sighed through the godswood and the red leaves stirred and whispered. Summer bared his teeth. “You hear them, boy?” a voice asked.

Bran lifted his head. Osha stood across the pool, beneath an ancient oak, her face shadowed by leaves. Even in irons, the wildling moved quiet as a cat. Summer circled the pool, sniffed at her. The tall woman flinched.

“Summer, to me,” Bran called. The direwolf took one final sniff, spun, and bounded back. Bran wrapped his arms around him. “What are *you* doing here?” He had not seen Osha since they’d taken her captive in the wolfswood, though he knew she’d been set to working in the kitchens.

“They are my gods too,” Osha said. “Beyond the Wall, they are the only gods.” Her hair was growing out, brown and shaggy. It made her look more womanly, that and the simple dress of brown roughspun they’d given her when they took her mail and leather. “Gage lets me have my prayers from time to time, when I feel the need, and I let him do as he likes under my skirt, when he feels the need. It’s nothing to me. I like the smell of flour on his hands, and he’s gentler than Stiv.” She gave an awkward bow. “I’ll leave you. There’s pots that want scouring.”

“No, stay,” Bran commanded her. “Tell me what you meant, about hearing the gods.”

Osha studied him. “You asked them and they’re answering. Open your ears, listen, you’ll hear.”

Bran listened. “It’s only the wind,” he said after a moment, uncertain. “The leaves are rustling.”

“Who do you think sends the wind, if not the gods?” She seated herself across the pool from him, clinking faintly as she moved. Mikken had fixed iron manacles to her ankles, with a heavy chain between them; she could walk, so long as she kept her strides small, but there was no way for her to run, or climb, or mount a horse. “They see you, boy. They hear you talking. That rustling, that’s them talking back.”

“What are they saying?”

“They’re sad. Your lord brother will get no help from them, not where he’s going. The old gods have no power in the south. The weirwoods there were all cut down, thousands of years ago. How can they watch your brother when they have no eyes?”

Bran had not thought of that. It frightened him. If even the gods could not help his brother, what hope was there? Maybe Osha wasn't hearing them right. He cocked his head and tried to listen again. He thought he could hear the sadness now, but nothing more than that.

The rustling grew louder. Bran heard muffled footfalls and a low humming, and Hodor came blundering out of the trees, naked and smiling. "Hodor!"

"He must have heard our voices," Bran said. "Hodor, you forgot your clothes."

"Hodor," Hodor agreed. He was dripping wet from the neck down, steaming in the chill air. His body was covered with brown hair, thick as a pelt. Between his legs, his manhood swung long and heavy.

Osha eyed him with a sour smile. "Now there's a big man," she said. "He has giant's blood in him, or I'm the queen."

"Maester Luwin says there are no more giants. He says they're all dead, like the children of the forest. All that's left of them are old bones in the earth that men turn up with plows from time to time."

"Let Maester Luwin ride beyond the Wall," Osha said. "He'll find giants then, or they'll find him. My brother killed one. Ten foot tall she was, and stunted at that. They've been known to grow big as twelve and thirteen feet. Fierce things they are too, all hair and teeth, and the wives have beards like their husbands, so there's no telling them apart. The women take human men for lovers, and it's from them the half bloods come. It goes harder on the women they catch. The men are so big they'll rip a maid apart before they get her with child." She grinned at him. "But you don't know what I mean, do you, boy?"

"Yes I do," Bran insisted. He understood about mating; he had seen dogs in the yard, and watched a stallion mount a mare. But talking about it made him uncomfortable. He looked at Hodor. "Go back and bring your clothes, Hodor," he said. "Go dress."

"Hodor." He walked back the way he had come, ducking under a low-hanging tree limb.

He *was* awfully big, Bran thought as he watched him go. “Are there truly giants beyond the Wall?” he asked Osha, uncertainly.

“Giants and worse than giants, Lordling. I tried to tell your brother when he asked his questions, him and your maester and that smiley boy Greyjoy. The cold winds are rising, and men go out from their fires and never come back... or if they do, they’re not *men* no more, but only wights, with blue eyes and cold black hands. Why do you think I run south with Stiv and Hali and the rest of them fools? Mance thinks he’ll fight, the brave sweet stubborn man, like the white walkers were no more than rangers, but what does he know? He can call himself King-beyond-the-Wall all he likes, but he’s still just another old black crow who flew down from the Shadow Tower. He’s never tasted winter. I was *born* up there, child, like my mother and *her* mother before her and her mother before her, born of the Free Folk. We remember.” Osha stood, her chains rattling together. “I tried to tell your lordling brother. Only yesterday, when I saw him in the yard. ‘M’lord Stark,’ I called to him, respectful as you please, but he looked through me, and that sweaty oaf Greatjon Umber shoves me out of the path. So be it. I’ll wear my irons and hold my tongue. A man who won’t listen can’t hear.”

“Tell *me*. Robb will listen to me, I know he will.”

“Will he now? We’ll see. You tell him this, m’lord. You tell him he’s bound on marching the wrong way. It’s north he should be taking his swords. *North*, not south. You hear me?”

Bran nodded. “I’ll tell him.”

But that night, when they feasted in the Great Hall, Robb was not with them. He took his meal in the solar instead, with Lord Rickard and the Greatjon and the other lords bannermen, to make the final plans for the long march to come. It was left to Bran to fill his place at the head of the table, and act the host to Lord Karstark’s sons and honored friends. They were already at their places when Hodor carried Bran into the hall on his back, and knelt beside the high seat. Two of the serving men helped lift him from his basket. Bran could feel the eyes of every stranger in the hall. It had grown quiet. “My lords,” Hallis Mollen announced, “Brandon Stark, of Winterfell.”

“I welcome you to our fires,” Bran said stiffly, “and offer you meat and mead in honor of our friendship.”

Harrion Karstark, the oldest of Lord Rickard’s sons, bowed, and his brothers after him, yet as they settled back in their places he heard the younger two talking in low voices, over the clatter of wine cups. “...sooner die than live like that,” muttered one, his father’s namesake Eddard, and his brother Torrhen said likely the boy was broken inside as well as out, too craven to take his own life.

Broken, Bran thought bitterly as he clutched his knife. Is that what he was now? Bran the Broken? “I don’t want to be broken,” he whispered fiercely to Maester Luwin, who’d been seated to his right. “I want to be a knight.”

“There are some who call my order the knights of the mind,” Luwin replied. “You are a surpassing clever boy when you work at it, Bran. Have you ever thought that you might wear a maester’s chain? There is no limit to what you might learn.”

“I want to learn *magic*,” Bran told him. “The crow promised that I would fly.”

Maester Luwin sighed. “I can teach you history, healing, herblore. I can teach you the speech of ravens, and how to build a castle, and the way a sailor steers his ship by the stars. I can teach you to measure the days and mark the seasons, and at the Citadel in Oldtown they can teach you a thousand things more. But, Bran, no man can teach you magic.”

“The children could,” Bran said. “The children of the forest.” That reminded him of the promise he had made to Osha in the godswood, so he told Luwin what she had said.

The maester listened politely. “The wildling woman could give Old Nan lessons in telling tales, I think,” he said when Bran was done. “I will talk with her again if you like, but it would be best if you did not trouble your brother with this folly. He has more than enough to concern him without fretting over giants and dead men in the woods. It’s the Lannisters who hold your lord father, Bran, not the children of the forest.” He put a gentle hand on Bran’s arm. “Think on what I said, child.”

And two days later, as a red dawn broke across a windswept sky, Bran found himself in the yard beneath the gatehouse, strapped atop Dancer as he said his farewells to his brother.

“You are the lord in Winterfell now,” Robb told him. He was mounted on a shaggy grey stallion, his shield hung from the horse’s side; wood banded with iron, white and grey, and on it the snarling face of a direwolf. His brother wore grey chainmail over bleached leathers, sword and dagger at his waist, a fur-trimmed cloak across his shoulders. “You must take my place, as I took Father’s, until we come home.”

“I know,” Bran replied miserably. He had never felt so little or alone or scared. He did not know how to be a lord.

“Listen to Maester Luwin’s counsel, and take care of Rickon. Tell him that I’ll be back as soon as the fighting is done.”

Rickon had refused to come down. He was up in his chamber, redeyed and defiant. “*No!*” he’d screamed when Bran had asked if he didn’t want to say farewell to Robb. “*NO farewell!*”

“I told him,” Bran said. “He says no one ever comes back.”

“He can’t be a baby forever. He’s a Stark, and near four.” Robb sighed. “Well, Mother will be home soon. And I’ll bring back Father, I promise.”

He wheeled his courser around and trotted away. Grey Wind followed, loping beside the warhorse, lean and swift. Hallis Mollen went before them through the gate, carrying the rippling white banner of House Stark atop a high standard of grey ash. Theon Greyjoy and the Greatjon fell in on either side of Robb, and their knights formed up in a double column behind them, steel-tipped lances glinting in the sun.

Uncomfortably, he remembered Osha’s words. *He’s marching the wrong way*, he thought. For an instant he wanted to gallop after him and shout a warning, but when Robb vanished beneath the portcullis, the moment was gone.

Beyond the castle walls, a roar of sound went up. The foot soldiers and townsfolk were cheering Robb as he rode past, Bran knew; cheering for Lord Stark, for the Lord of Winterfell on his great stallion, with his cloak

streaming and Grey Wind racing beside him. They would never cheer for him that way, he realized with a dull ache. He might be the lord in Winterfell while his brother and father were gone, but he was still Bran the Broken. He could not even get off his own horse, except to fall.

When the distant cheers had faded to silence and the yard was empty at last, Winterfell seemed deserted and dead. Bran looked around at the faces of those who remained, women and children and old men... and Hodor. The huge stableboy had a lost and frightened look to his face. "Hodor?" he said sadly.

"Hodor," Bran agreed, wondering what it meant.