

corn. "I am told you can read." He shook the raven off, and it flapped its wings and flew to the window, where it sat watching as Mormont drew a roll of paper from his belt and handed it to Jon. "Com, " it muttered in a raucous voice. "Com, com. "

Jon's finger traced the outline of the direwolf in the white wax of the broken seal. He recognized Robb's hand, but the letters seemed to blur and run as he tried to read them. He realized he was crying. And then, through the tears, he found the sense in the words, and raised his head. "He woke up," he said. "The gods gave him back."

"Crippled," Mormont said. "I'm sorry, boy. Read the rest of the letter."

He looked at the words, but they didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Bran was going to live. "My brother is going to live," he told Mormont. The Lord Commander shook his head, gathered up a fistful of corn, and whistled. The raven flew to his shoulder, crying, "Live! Live!"

Jon ran down the stairs, a smile on his face and Robb's letter in his hand. "My brother is going to live," he told the guards. They exchanged a look. He ran back to the common hall, where he found Tyrion Lannister just finishing his meal. He grabbed the little man under the arms, hoisted him up in the air, and spun him around in a circle. "Bran is going to live!" he whooped. Lannister looked startled. Jon put him down and thrust the paper into his hands. "Here, read it," he said.

Others were gathering around and looking at him curiously. Jon noticed Grenn a few feet away. A thick woolen bandage was wrapped around one hand. He looked anxious and uncomfortable, not menacing at all. Jon went to him. Grenn edged backward and put up his hands. "Stay away from me now, you bastard."

Jon smiled at him. "I'm sorry about your wrist. Robb used the same move on me once, only with a wooden blade. It hurt like seven hells, but yours must be worse. Look, if you want, I can show you how to defend that."

Alliser Thorne overheard him. "Lord Snow wants to take my place now." He sneered. "I'd have an easier time teaching a wolf to juggle than you will training this aurochs."

"I'll take that wager, Ser Alliser," Jon said. "I'd love to see Ghost juggle."

Jon heard Grenn suck in his breath, shocked. Silence fell.

Then Tyrion Lannister guffawed. Three of the black brothers joined in from a nearby table. The laughter spread up and down the benches, until even the cooks joined in. The birds stirred in the rafters, and finally even Grenn began to chuckle.

Ser Alliser never took his eyes from Jon. As the laughter rolled around him, his face darkened, and his sword hand curled into a fist. "That was a grievous error, Lord Snow," he said at last in the acid tones of an enemy.