

# BRAN

LONG BEFORE THE FIRST PALE FINGERS OF LIGHT PRIED APART BRAN'S SHUTTERS, HIS EYES WERE OPEN.

THERE WERE GUESTS IN WINTERFELL, VISITORS COME FOR THE HARVEST FEAST. THIS MORNING THEY WOULD BE TILTING AT QUINTAINS IN THE YARD.

ONCE THAT PROSPECT WOULD HAVE FILLED HIM WITH EXCITEMENT, BUT THAT WAS BEFORE.

THE WALDERS WOULD BREAK LANCES WITH THE SQUIRES OF LORD MANDERLY'S ESCORT, BUT BRAN WOULD HAVE NO PART OF IT.

HE MUST PLAY THE PRINCE IN HIS FATHER'S SOLAR.

BRAN HAD NEVER ASKED TO BE A PRINCE. IT WAS KNIGHTHOOD HE HAD ALWAYS DREAMED OF; BRIGHT ARMOR AND STREAMING BANNERS, LANCE AND SWORD, A WARHORSE BETWEEN HIS LEGS.

WHY MUST HE WASTE HIS DAYS LISTENING TO OLD MEN SPEAK OF THINGS HE ONLY HALF UNDERSTOOD?

BECAUSE YOU'RE BROKEN, A VOICE INSIDE REMINDED HIM.

LORD WYMAN MANDERLY HAD ARRIVED FROM WHITE HARBOR TWO DAYS PAST, TRAVELING BY BARGE AND LITTER, AS HE WAS TOO FAT TO SIT A HORSE.

WITH HIM HAD COME A LONG TAIL OF RETAINERS, ALL AGLITTER WITH BANNERS AND SURCOATS IN WHAT SEEMED LIKE HALF A HUNDRED COLORS.

BRAN HAD WELCOMED THEM TO WINTERFELL FROM HIS FATHER'S HIGH STONE SEAT, AND AFTERWARD SER RODRIK HAD SAID HE'D DONE WELL. IF THAT HAD BEEN THE END OF IT, HE WOULD NOT HAVE MINDED. BUT IT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.





NOW THERE'S AN UGLY HORSE.



HODOR'S NO HORSE.

WELL, HE'S NOT AS SMART AS A HORSE, THAT'S FOR CERTAIN.

YOU SHUT UP, FREY!

HODOR.



WHAT WILL YOU DO IF I DON'T?

HE'LL SET HIS WOLF ON YOU, COUSIN.

LET HIM. I ALWAYS WANTED A WOLFSKIN CLOAK.



SUMMER WOULD TEAR YOUR FAT HEAD—

ENOUGH!



THESE THREATS ARE UNSEMLY, AND I'LL HEAR NO MORE OF THEM. IS THIS HOW YOU BEHAVE AT THE TWINS, WALDER FREY?

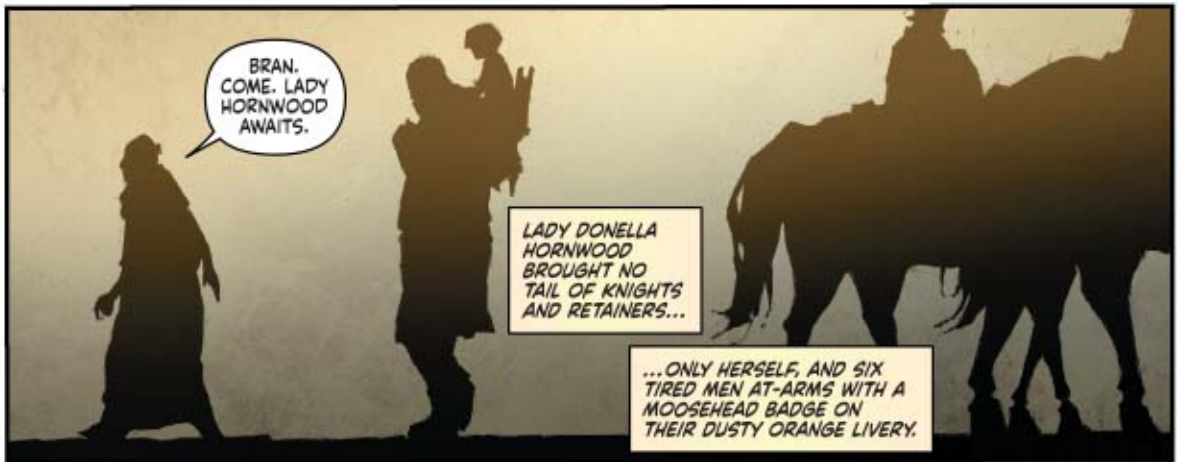
IF I WANT TO.

WE WERE HAVING A JAPE WITH HODOR. WE ONLY MEANT TO BE AMUSING.



A GOOD LORD COMFORTS AND PROTECTS THE WEAK AND HELPLESS. I WILL NOT HAVE YOU MAKING HODOR THE BUTT OF CRUEL JESTS, DO YOU HEAR ME?

HE'S A GOODHEARTED LAD, DUTIFUL AND OBEIENT, WHICH IS MORE THAN I CAN SAY FOR EITHER OF YOU!



BRAN. COME. LADY HORNWOOD AWAITS.

LADY DONELLA HORNWOOD BROUGHT NO TAIL OF KNIGHTS AND RETAINERS...

...ONLY HERSELF, AND SIX TIRED MEN AT-ARMS WITH A MOOSEHEAD BADGE ON THEIR DUSTY ORANGE LIVERY.

LADY DONELLA WAS A PALE HUSK OF A WOMAN, EVERY LINE OF HER FACE ETCHED WITH GRIEF.

LORD HORNWOOD HAD BEEN KILLED IN THE BATTLE ON THE GREEN FORK, THEIR ONLY SON CUT DOWN IN THE WHISPERING WOOD.

LADY HORNWOOD. WE ARE VERY SORRY FOR ALL YOU HAVE SUFFERED.

WINTERFELL WILL REMEMBER.

THAT IS GOOD TO KNOW.

BOLTON'S BASTARD IS MASSING MEN AT THE DREADFORT. I HOPE HE MEANS TO TAKE THEM SOUTH TO JOIN HIS FATHER AT THE TWINS...

...BUT WHEN I SENT TO ASK HIS INTENT, HE TOLD ME THAT NO BOLTON WOULD BE QUESTIONED BY A WOMAN. AS IF HE WERE TRUEBORN AND HAD A RIGHT TO THAT NAME.

LORD BOLTON HAS NEVER ACKNOWLEDGED THE BOY, SO FAR AS I KNOW. I CONFESS, I DO NOT KNOW HIM.

FEW DO. HE LIVED WITH HIS MOTHER UNTIL TWO YEARS PAST, WHEN YOUNG DOMERIC DIED AND LEFT BOLTON WITHOUT AN HEIR. THAT WAS WHEN HE BROUGHT HIS BASTARD TO THE DREADFORT.

THE BOY IS A SLY CREATURE BY ALL ACCOUNTS, AND HE HAS A SERVANT WHO IS ALMOST AS CRUEL AS HE IS. REEK, THEY CALL THE MAN. IT'S SAID HE NEVER BATHES.

THEY HUNT TOGETHER, AND NOT FOR DEER. I'VE HEARD TALES, THINGS I CAN SCARCE BELIEVE, EVEN OF A BOLTON...

...AND NOW THAT MY LORD HUSBAND AND MY SWEET SON HAVE GONE TO THE GODS, THE BASTARD LOOKS AT MY LANDS HUNGRILY...

HE MAY LOOK, BUT SHOULD HE DO MORE I PROMISE YOU THERE WILL BE DIRE RETRIBUTION. YOU WILL BE SAFE ENOUGH, MY LADY...THOUGH PERHAPS IN TIME, WHEN YOUR GRIEF IS PASSED, YOU MAY FIND IT PRUDENT TO WED AGAIN.

BRAN WANTED TO GIVE THE LADY A HUNDRED MEN TO DEFEND HER RIGHTS, BUT SER RODRIK THOUGHT OTHERWISE.

"SAD AND GENTLE, AND NOT AT ALL UNCOMELY FOR A WOMAN OF HER YEARS, YET A DANGER TO THE PEACE OF YOUR BROTHER'S REALM NONETHELESS," RODRIK TOLD HIM.

WITH NO DIRECT HEIR, THERE WERE MANY CLAIMANTS CONTENDING FOR THE HORNWOOD LANDS. THE TALLHARTS, FLINTS, AND KARSTARK'S ALL HAD TIES TO HOUSE HORNWOOD THROUGH THE FEMALE LINE...

...AND THE GLOVERS WERE FOSTERING LORD HORNWOOD'S BASTARD AT DEEPWOOD MOTTE.

AND THOUGH THE DREADFORT HAD NO CLAIM, THE LANDS WERE ADJOINED, AND ROOSE BOLTON WOULD NOT BE ONE TO OVERLOOK SUCH A CHANCE.



BEING A LORD WAS NOT SO TEDIOUS AS BRAN HAD FEARED, AND HE EVEN HAD A FEW HOURS OF DAYLIGHT LEFT TO VISIT WITH SUMMER.



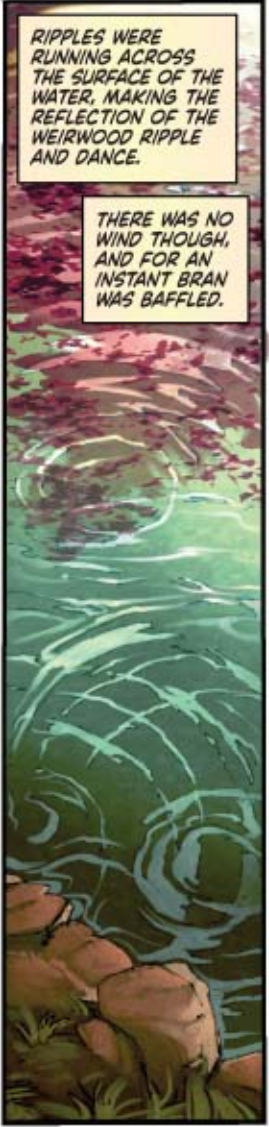
HE LIKED TO SPEND TIME WITH HIS WOLF EVERY DAY, WHEN SER RODRIK AND THE MAESTER ALLOWED IT.



BRAN GLIMPSED A LEAN BLACK SHAPE WATCHING FROM THE UNDERGROWTH, BUT RICKON'S SHAGGYDOG VANISHED AS SWIFTLY AS HE'D APPEARED.



BRAN'S FAVORITE PLACE WAS BENEATH THE GREAT SPREAD OF THE HEART TREE, WHERE LORD EDDARD USED TO PRAY.



RIPPLES WERE RUNNING ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE WATER, MAKING THE REFLECTION OF THE WEIRWOOD RIPPLE AND DANCE.

THERE WAS NO WIND THOUGH, AND FOR AN INSTANT BRAN WAS BAFFLED.



HHUUUAAA!



HODOR,  
HODOR!



HOW CAN  
YOU SWIM IN  
THERE? ISN'T  
IT COLD?

AS A  
BABE I SUCKLED ON  
ICICLES, BOY. I LIKE  
THE COLD.



WHAT ARE  
YOU STARING  
AT? NEVER  
SEEN A WOMAN  
BEFORE?

YOU'VE  
GOT A LOT  
OF SCARS.



EVERY  
ONE HARD  
EARNED.

FIGHTING  
GIANTS?

FIGHTING  
MEN.

BLACK CROWS,  
OFT AS NOT,  
KILLED ME ONE,  
TOO.