

The following extract is from the opening of George R. R. Martin's "A Game of Thrones". In this section of the novel, Bran, a young boy, watches his father execute a man.

1 The morning had dawned clear and cold, with a crispness that hinted at the end of summer. They set forth at
2 daybreak to see a man beheaded, twenty in all, and Bran rode among them, nervous with excitement. This was the
3 first time he had been deemed old enough to go with his lord father and his brothers to see the king's justice done. It
4 was the ninth year of summer, and the seventh of Bran's life.

5 The man had been taken outside a small holdfast in the hills. Robb thought he was a wildling, his sword sworn to
6 Mance Rayder, the King-beyond-the-Wall. It made Bran's skin prickle to think of it. He remembered the hearth tales
7 Old Nan told them. The wildlings were cruel men, she said, slavers and slayers and thieves. They consorted with
8 giants and ghouls, stole girl children in the dead of night, and drank blood from polished horns. And their women lay
9 with the Others in the Long Night to sire terrible half-human children.

10 But the man they found bound hand and foot to the holdfast wall awaiting the king's justice was old and scrawny,
11 not much taller than Robb. He had lost both ears and a finger to frostbite, and he dressed all in black, the same as a
12 brother of the Night's Watch, except that his furs were ragged and greasy.

13 The breath of man and horse mingled, steaming, in the cold morning air as his lord father had the man cut down
14 from the wall and dragged before them. Robb and Jon sat tall and still on their horses, with Bran between them on
15 his pony, trying to seem older than seven, trying to pretend that he'd seen all this before. A faint wind blew through
16 the holdfast gate. Over their heads flapped the banner of the Starks of Winterfell: a grey direwolf racing across an
17 ice-white field.

18 Bran's father sat solemnly on his horse, long brown hair stirring in the wind. His closely trimmed beard was shot with
19 white, making him look older than his thirty-five years. He had a grim cast to his grey eyes this day, and he seemed
20 not at all the man who would sit before the fire in the evening and talk softly of the age of heroes and the children of
21 the forest. He had taken off Father's face, Bran thought, and donned the face of Lord Stark of Winterfell.

22 There were questions asked and answers given there in the chill of morning, but afterward Bran could not recall
23 much of what had been said. Finally his lord father gave a command, and two of his guardsmen dragged the ragged
24 man to the ironwood stump in the center of the square. They forced his head down onto the hard black wood. Lord
25 Eddard Stark dismounted and his ward Theon Greyjoy brought forth the sword. "Ice," that sword was called. It was
26 as wide across as a man's hand, and taller even than Robb. The blade was Valyrian steel, spell-forged and dark as
27 smoke. Nothing held an edge like Valyrian steel.

28 His father peeled off his gloves and handed them to Jory Cassel, the captain of his household guard. He took hold of
29 Ice with both hands and said, "In the name of Robert of the House Baratheon, the First of his Name, King of the
30 Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, by the word of
31 Eddard of the House Stark, Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, I do sentence you to die."

32 He lifted the great sword high above his head.