

Jon Flint

Jon woke to sunlight streaming through his window and the distant sounds of Winterfell coming to life. For a moment, he lay still, thinking about everything Ross had told him the night before. The archer in the wolfwood. The tournament at Highgarden. Lady Maege's plans for Dacey.

He pushed the thoughts aside and rose, moving through his morning routine. Cold water from the basin to wake himself properly, then dressing in clothes suitable for what was coming, a simple linen shirt, wool breeches, his favorite leather jerkin that allowed for easy movement. He strapped his belt on, the kukri knife sitting comfortably at his hip where it always did.

Today was the sparring match with Dacey Mormont. The entire castle would be watching.

Jon ran his fingers through his shoulder-length curls, trying once again to tame them into something presentable. As usual, they refused to cooperate, falling in dark waves that framed his face no matter what he did. He studied his reflection in the polished bronze mirror, purple eyes staring back at him, brighter than the sun, as Arya once told him.

His mother must have had purple eyes. That was the only explanation. Father's eyes were grey as winter storms, Robb's eyes were blue, the same for Sansa, Bran, and Rickon. They had taken after their mother for the eye color. The only odd one was Arya, who had taken the eyes of her father. It seemed that he and Arya had one difference after all, she took after her father in eyes and hair color, but Jon took only the hair from his father.

It must have been Ashara Dayne. Everyone knew Father had danced with Lady Ashara in Harrenhal. Lady Ashara had been beautiful, famous for her violet eyes. And then she'd thrown herself from a tower, grief-stricken over something no one would speak of.

Jon looked at his face. Could his father see her in his face? Was that the reason he never spoke of her? It was too painful for him? Jon did not know. Sometimes, he wished his father would just tell him the truth; he deserved that much.

Jon's mind suddenly went to who he believed to be Princess Daenerys, and Rhae...Jon always found it odd...Why would he dream of them? Rhae was clearly the daughter of someone rich, even if she had tried to hide it, perhaps the daughter of Prince Oberyn. But why did he dream of her and Princess Daenerys...the three of them had nothing in common. The daughter of the Mad King, the Bastard girl of a Prince, and the bastard son of Lord Stark.

Jon's attention went to someone...else who was...known to have purple eyes, and it would somewhat explain his dreams with who he believed to be Princess Daenerys, but Jon knew it could not be that, it wasn't that, it could not be...if it were true....no, it's not true...he wasn't the son...of them...no...his parents loved one another, Jon believed that much, so it could not be...them. Jon slapped his face with water again, clearing his mind.

Jon made his way through Winterfell's corridors toward the Main Hall. The castle was alive, servants rushing about, guards changing shifts, the smell of fresh bread and bacon drifting from

the kitchens. Several people greeted him as he passed, and Jon made sure to return each greeting with a smile and their name.

"Morning, Lord Jon," called Calon, one of the guards he'd shared a joke with yesterday. "Big day today!"

"That it is," Jon agreed. "Try not to lose too much coin betting against me."

Calon laughed. "Wouldn't dream of it, my lord!"

The Main Hall's doors stood open, and Jon could hear the buzz of conversation even before he entered. When he stepped inside, he understood why. The hall was packed, not just with the household as usual, but with what seemed like half of Winterfell's staff and guards, all eager to witness the morning's entertainment before heading to the practice yards.

The high table was already full. Father sat at the center in the Lord's chair. Lady Catelyn sat beside him, her auburn hair were brushed until it shone, her expression was polite, but Jon could almost hear her thoughts. Baby Rickon squirmed in her lap, already restless despite the early hour.

Grandmother Lyarra sat to Father's right, and Jon felt a small warmth in his chest at the sight of her. She caught his eye and smiled. She knew what Jon was capable of. She'd been the one to send him to Breakstone Hill all those years ago, to be forged into something more than just another bastard.

And there, dominating the high table simply by existing, was Great-grandfather Anden.

Even seated, Lord Anden Flint made everyone else look small. At three meters tall, the man was a living legend, and this morning he seemed in particularly good spirits. His massive hands—each the size of a dinner plate—rested on the table before him, and his beard, which reached past his collarbone, seemed to bristle with amusement. Derek sat beside him, Jon's old master-at-arms looking relaxed and confident.

Uncle Benjen, his lady wife, Arthur, and Joanna were sitting nearby, with Joanna making gestures with her hand as if she was practising a dance on the chair she was sitting on, with Arthur looking at her with amusement.

The Mormont contingent occupied a prominent position at one of the long tables near the high table. Lady Maege sat at the center. Her daughters flanked her: Alysane, Lyra, and Jorelle on one side, young Lyanna on the other.

And there, at the end of the bench, sat Dacey.

She was already dressed for the sparring match, wearing fighting leathers that emphasized her warrior's build. Her dark hair was pulled back in a warrior braid for women.

Their gazes met. Held. Dacey's lips curved into a slight smile, and she raised her cup in a small salute.

Jon returned it with a grin of his own, then made his way toward where Robb and Arthur sat.

"There he is," Robb announced as Jon slid onto the bench between them. "The man of the hour. You look surprisingly well-rested for someone who's about to get beaten with a morningstar."

"Who says I'm going to get beaten?" Jon reached for the bacon, his stomach suddenly reminding him he hadn't eaten since yesterday's lunch.

"Common sense?" Robb suggested cheerfully. "Dacey Mormont is bigger than you, stronger than you, and has been training with actual weapons since she could walk. Meanwhile, you're—"

"Faster, cleverer, and better-looking," Jon interrupted, loading his plate. "Don't forget those important factors."

Arthur snorted into his porridge. "I don't think 'better-looking' is going to help much when she's swinging a morningstar at your head."

"You'd be surprised what being better-looking can do," Jon replied with exaggerated seriousness. "Distracts the opponent. Makes them hesitate. It's all very tactical."

"You're ridiculous," Robb said.

The hall buzzed with conversation, most of it centered on the upcoming match. Jon could hear fragments as he ate, bets being placed, predictions being made, arguments about proper fighting techniques. It seemed everyone had an opinion about how the morning would unfold.

"—say the boy's quick, but quick doesn't beat strong—"

"—seen Lady Dacey fight. She's like a bear in human form—"

"—Flint boy's clever though. Might surprise us—"

Jon focused on his breakfast and tried to ignore the pressure building in his chest. He'd fought before, trained for years under Derek and Great-grandfather Anden. He knew he was skilled. But this was different. This was public. This was a test not just of his abilities but of who he was, what he represented.

A loud voice cut through the general chatter, booming across the hall with the force of an avalanche.

"MAEGE MORMONT!"

Everyone turned to look at Great-grandfather Anden, who had risen from his seat at the high table. Standing, he seemed to fill half the hall. His black eyes sparkled with mischief.

Lady Maege looked up, one eyebrow raised. "Lord Anden?"

"I hear tell you've got concerns about this morning's match," Anden declared, his voice carrying to every corner of the room. "Worried your girl might hurt my boy. That about right?"

Jon saw Lady Maege's lips twitch. "I have no such concerns, my lord. Though I appreciate your confidence in your great-grandson."

"Confidence?" Anden's laugh boomed out. "Woman, the boy might only be thirteen, but he's thrice the man everyone else is! THRICE, I say! He'll give your Dacey a proper fight, mark my words!"

The hall erupted in laughter and cheers. Jon felt his face heat, but he couldn't help grinning. Trust Great-grandfather to make such a declaration in front of everyone.

Lady Maege's expression didn't change, but her eyes glinted with amusement. "Thrice the man, you say? Does that include you, my lord?"

Anden paused mid-laugh.

Maege continued. "Because if young Jon is thrice the man you are, Lord Anden, his head will be peeking through the roof. We'll need to expand Winterfell's doorways just to accommodate him."

There was silence.

Then Anden threw back his head and laughed, a sound like thunder rolling across mountains. The entire hall joined him, the laughter washing over everything in waves. Even Father cracked a smile, and Grandmother Lyarra was openly giggling.

"HAR!" Anden slapped the table, making the dishes jump. "Well struck, Lady Maege! Well struck indeed! I like you. You've got iron in your spine and ice in your tongue. I always loved that in a woman!"

"I learned early that dealing with men of your stature requires both," Maege replied. "Among other things."

"Our great-grandfather is a terror," Arthur observed quietly. "I don't know whether to be terrified or impressed."

"Both," Jon and Robb said simultaneously, then grinned at each other.

Lady Catelyn's voice cut through the good humor, proper and pointed. "I do hope everyone remembers that this morning's activities are meant to be a display of skill and proper conduct. Sparring is not the same as actual combat. There are rules. Decorum."

The emphasis on 'proper conduct' and 'decorum' was clearly aimed at Jon, though Lady Stark was too diplomatic to say so directly.

Jon opened his mouth to respond, but Arya beat him to it.

"I'm betting on Jon!" his sister announced loudly from where she sat with Lyanna Mormont, and now Joanna was with her... when did she get there? "Five copper stars says he wins!"

"I'm betting on Dacey," Lyanna Mormont countered immediately, her young voice fierce with loyalty. "Ten copper stars!"

"You don't have ten copper stars," Arya pointed out.

"I will after Dacey wins!"

Sansa, sitting with Jeyne Poole, looked scandalized. "Betting is unladylike. Mother, tell them betting is unladylike."

"Betting is unladylike," Lady Catelyn repeated dutifully, but she knew it was pointless. Everyone knew the guards were already placing bets in the barracks, probably had been since yesterday.

"Can I watch from the walls?" Bran asked eagerly. "Please? I can see better from up high!"

"Absolutely not," Father said firmly. "You'll watch from the practice yard like everyone else. Where it's safe."

"But Jon climbs all the time and he's fine!"

"Jon is thirteen and has been training for years. You're seven. The answer is no."

Bran's face fell, but before he could protest further, baby Rickon started banging his spoon on the table, apparently having absorbed enough of the conversation to understand something exciting was happening.

"Fight!" Rickon declared, his chubby face serious. "Want see fight!"

"You're too young for—" Lady Catelyn started.

"FIGHT!"

Jon looked away, and his purple eyes found her again. Dacey's grey eyes found his across the hall. She didn't smile, didn't nod, just held his gaze for a long moment before looking at her sister as she whispered something at her ear.

That look said everything: *I'm ready. Are you?*

"You're staring," Robb observed quietly.

"I'm assessing my opponent," Jon corrected.

"Whatever or not she will be good in bed,"

"In a fight you mean,"

Arthur leaned in, his young voice thoughtful. "She looks... dangerous."

"She is dangerous," Jon agreed. "That's what makes it interesting."

A shadow fell across the table, and Jon looked up to find Derek standing there.

"Final advice?" Jon asked.

"You've had all the advice I can give over the years," Derek replied. "But I'll remind you one more time: speed over strength. Make her adapt to you, don't let her dictate the pace." He paused, then added more quietly, "And remember, you're not just fighting for yourself today. You're representing House Flint. Your great-grandfather's watching. Don't embarrass us."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Jon said, and meant it.

Derek clapped him once on the shoulder, hard enough to sting, then moved away to rejoin Lord Anden at the high table.

Robb leaned close. "Ready to not embarrass yourself?"

"Ready to win."

"That's the spirit." Robb grabbed another piece of bacon. "Though if she does break your arm, try to make it your left one. You're useless at sparring with your off-hand anyway."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"That's what brothers are for."

The hall was beginning to empty now, people finishing their meals and drifting toward the doors. The practice yards would be packed, everyone wanted to see this.

Father caught his eye from the high table and gave him a small nod. Not quite approval, Father probably wished this whole spectacle wasn't happening, but acknowledgment at least. Recognition that Jon was about to do something significant.

Grandmother Lyarra smiled at him. She believed in him. She always had, from the very beginning, when everyone else had seen just another bastard.

Great-grandfather Anden raised his cup in Jon's direction, a gesture of confidence that felt like a blessing.

Jon stood, Arthur and Robb rising with him.

"Well," Robb said. "Let's go watch you either become a legend or a cautionary tale."

"Always so encouraging," Jon muttered.

They moved toward the doors with the rest of the crowd. As they passed the Mormont table, Dacey fell into step beside them. She didn't say anything, just walked parallel to Jon, close enough that he could smell the leather oil on her armor and the faint scent of pine that seemed to cling to all the Bear Island warriors.

"Nice morning for it," she said finally.

"Beautiful," Jon agreed. "Clear skies. Good light. Perfect weather for public humiliation."

Dacey's lips twitched. "Yours or mine?"

"That's what we're about to find out."

Jon Flint

The practice yard had never looked so crowded.

Jon stood at the eastern entrance, rolling his shoulders to loosen the padded leather training armor that Derek had strapped onto him twenty minutes earlier. The armor was well-made—supple enough to allow movement but thick enough to absorb the impact of blunted weapons.

Across the yard, Dacey Mormont entered from the western gate. Her dark hair was pulled back in a tight braid, and even from this distance, Jon could see the beauty hiding beneath that armor, and he could see the way she was looking at him.

She was here to win. That much was obvious.

Jon gripped the handle of his sword. He took a few practice swings, feeling the weight, remembering Derek's lessons about balance and leverage.

Speed over strength. Make her adapt to you.

The crowd pressed in from all sides, transforming the practice yard into something resembling a tourney ground. Household guards lined the walls, servants clustered in available spaces, and what seemed like half of Wintertown had somehow found their way inside to witness the match. The noise was tremendous, voices calling out bets, arguments about fighting techniques, speculation about who would win.

Jon's eyes tracked to the high platform where Father sat with Lady Catelyn beside him, baby Rickon squirming in her lap. Father's expression was blank and cold like ice, but Jon knew him well enough to know his father was not a big fan of what was happening in his training yard.

Grandmother Lyarra sat to Father's right, and she seemed relaxed as if she already knew how this fight would go.

Great Grandfather stood rather than sat, the platform's bench would have been comically inadequate for his three-meter frame. Even standing still, Great-grandfather dominated the space, his massive beard bristling as he surveyed the yard looking at people as if they were his soldiers. Derek stood beside him, arms crossed.

Lady Maege Mormont occupied a prominent position at ground level, her daughters arrayed around her like a honor guard. Alysane scowled from her mother's left, clearly unhappy about something. The younger Mormont sisters, Lyra, Jorelle, and little Lyanna, watched with varying degrees of interest and concern. They knew Dacey was good. They wanted to see if Jon was better.

Ser Rodrik Cassel walked to the center of the practice yard, his white mustaches bristling impressively. The old master-at-arms raised his hands, and the crowd quieted, not to complete silence, but enough that his voice would carry.

"This is a sparring match between Jon Flint, heir to Breakstone Hill, and Lady Dacey Mormont of Bear Island!" His voice boomed across the yard. "The rules are simple: first to yield, first to be disarmed, or first to land three solid strikes wins the match!"

Jon took his position on the eastern side of the yard, Dacey mirroring him on the west.

"No strikes to the head or groin!" Ser Rodrik continued. "This is training, not a death match! Both fighters will maintain honor and discipline! Any attempt to seriously injure your opponent will result in immediate disqualification!"

Jon nodded his understanding. Dacey did the same, her Morningstar, a practice version with a wooden head wrapped in leather, held loosely in her right hand. The weapon looked deceptively simple, but Jon knew better. A morningstar's momentum could shatter bones even in practice form. And Dacey had the strength to use it devastatingly.

"Fighters ready!" Ser Rodrik backed toward the edge of the yard, hand raised.

Jon settled into his stance, left foot forward, right foot back, sword held in a middle guard position that could transition quickly to attack or defense.

Across from him, Dacey rolled her shoulders and grinned.

"Begin!"

They circled each other warily, boots scuffing against the packed dirt of the practice yard. Jon kept his eyes on Dacey's center mass. Derek had taught him that watching an opponent's chest and shoulders would telegraph their movements better than watching their weapon or eyes. People could fake with their hands, but the body always moved first.

Dacey struck first.

The morning star came down. Jon didn't try to block; that would be stupid. Instead, he stepped to the left, letting the weapon whistle past his right shoulder; he felt the wind slapping his shoulder.

Dacey didn't pause. She pressed forward immediately, using the morningstar's reach advantage to keep Jon moving. A horizontal swing at chest height. A diagonal slash from high to low. Each strike came with power behind it, the leather-wrapped head humming through the air.

Jon gave ground, always staying just outside her optimal striking range. His sword came up only when necessary, deflecting rather than blocking, redirecting rather than stopping. He was studying her, the way she moved.

She favors power over finesse. Every strike commits fully. She's confident in her strength.

The crowd's murmur grew louder. Jon could hear fragments of conversation:

"—not even trying to fight back—"

"—expected more from the Flint boy—"

"—just dodging, that's not a strategy—"

Dacey feinted left, and Jon's body tensed to move in that direction. Then she reversed, striking right with the full power of a rotating hip behind it. Jon barely got his sword up in time, and when steel met wood-and-leather, the impact shivered up his arms hard enough to make his teeth click together.

Gods, she's strong.

He stumbled back half a step.

"Not bad, Flint," she called out, circling. "But you're going to have to do better than just running away."

Jon didn't respond. Speaking during a fight was wasted breath and broken concentration.

They engaged again. Dacey came at him with a three-strike combination, high, low, high, that forced Jon to dance backward, his sword working constantly to deflect rather than absorb. His breathing came harder now. He let his left foot drag slightly, as if his balance was off. Let his sword arm dip a fraction lower than optimal guard position.

Three more exchanges, each one with Jon primarily defensive. He watched her every little move: Dacey's tendency to shift her weight to her back foot before her most powerful strikes. The way she pulled the morningstar back slightly before swinging, creating a tell. How she preferred to chain attacks in odd numbers, three strikes, then five, then three again.

Dacey wound up for another overhead strike, and Jon saw it before she even committed, the weight shifting to her back foot, the slight pull-back of her weapon, the way her shoulders tensed in preparation for maximum power.

Instead of retreating like he had for the past several exchanges, Jon suddenly exploded forward.

The move caught Dacey completely off-guard. She'd expected him to backpedal again, to keep playing defense. Instead, Jon closed the distance in two rapid steps, getting inside the morningstar's reach before she could complete the downward arc.

The weapon whistled past his left shoulder, hitting the air.

His practice sword struck Dacey solidly in the ribs on her right side. She gasped and stumbled backward, eyes wide with surprise.

"First point to Jon Flint!" Ser Rodrik's voice boomed across the suddenly silent yard.

Then the silence broke, and the crowd erupted.

Half the spectators cheered, those who'd bet on Jon, or who simply appreciated good technique. The other half shouted in surprise, clearly not having expected the younger, smaller fighter to score first. Arguments broke out immediately about whether the move had been legal, whether Jon had gotten lucky, whether Dacey had simply been careless.

Jon stepped back to his starting position, breathing controlled, and allowed himself a quick glance at the platform.

Grandmother Lyarra was smiling, not broadly, but she was smiling, and that smile filled his heart with fire.

Lord Anden's laugh boomed across the practice yard, louder than the crowd noise. "PATIENCE AND TIMING!" the giant northerner bellowed. "THAT'S MY BOY! That's how a Flint fights!"

Father looked relieved. This was proper technique.

Even Lady Catelyn seemed surprised.

Lady Maege Mormont leaned forward, her eyes intent on Jon with new interest. This wasn't just a boy playing at fighting. This was someone who'd been trained well and who knew how to use that training.

Alysane scowled deeper, her arms crossed tightly across her chest. She clearly hadn't expected Jon to score first.

The other Mormont sisters exchanged worried glances, suddenly less certain about the outcome they'd predicted.

Dacey straightened from where she'd been rubbing her ribs. Her expression had shifted from confident amusement to annoyance and surprise...and was that arousal?

"You were holding back," she said, loud enough for the front rows to hear.

Jon allowed himself a slight smile. "Just getting a feel for your style."

"Well." Dacey rolled her shoulders, resetting her grip on the morningstar. "Now I know better."

They circled again, but this time Dacey moved differently. More cautiously. Watching Jon the way a hunter watches dangerous prey.

Dacey changed her entire approach.

Gone was the straightforward power-focused assault. Instead, she began using the morningstar's reach more cleverly, keeping Jon at distance with a series of quick, controlled strikes that didn't commit fully. Probing attacks meant to test his reactions, to force him to reveal his defensive patterns.

Jon found himself actually working now, his footwork constantly engaged to stay mobile. Dacey was forcing him to circle, to retreat, to adjust his positioning constantly. She wasn't trying to overpower him anymore—she was trying to control the space, to dictate where the fight happened.

The exchange became faster.

Dacey began pressing him toward the practice yard's western wall, using angles and positioning to limit his movement options. Jon recognized the tactic, corner your opponent, reduce their ability to dodge, force them to block instead of evade.

"Now she's got him," someone called out.

"Knew it was too good to last," another voice agreed.

Jon's back was nearly to the wall now. Dacey feinted high, Jon's sword came up to guard, then she struck low, the morningstar sweeping toward his legs to take his feet out from under him.

Jon leaped, the weapon passing beneath his boots. He landed slightly off-balance, and Dacey pressed the advantage immediately.

A chain of attacks came at him, high, low, middle, high again. Jon's sword worked constantly, deflecting, redirecting, but he was being pushed fully onto the defensive now.

His back touched the wall.

Dacey's eyes gleamed with triumph. She wound up for a powerful diagonal strike, committing fully to end the exchange and score her first point.

Jon saw his opening.

At the last possible second, as the morningstar descended towards him, Jon dropped into a low crouch.

Then he sidestepped to her right, no longer against the wall, and struck her four more times for good measure, one of them landing accidentally on her backside.

One of the hits struck Dacey's wrist, her fingers spasmed, and lost their grip.

The morningstar fell from her hand, hitting the packed dirt with a dull thud that seemed impossibly loud in the sudden silence.

Jon's sword came up, the point hovering at Dacey's throat.

Complete silence filled the practice yard.

Then Ser Rodrik's voice: "Disarmed! Match to Jon Flint!"

Time seemed frozen. Jon and Dacey stared at each other, both breathing hard, sweat on both faces.

Jon lowered his sword immediately, stepping back. He offered his hand to Dacey.

She stared at the offered hand for a long moment. Then she laughed. She took his hand, her grip firm.

"You sneaky bastard," she said.

Jon grinned. "I prefer 'tactically creative.'"

"You made me think I was winning."

"You were winning," Jon pointed out. "Until you weren't."

Dacey shook her head admiringly, still holding his hand. "Derek taught you well."

"And you nearly had me two times," Jon replied honestly. "That morningstar is terrifying in your hands."

They stood like that for a moment longer, hands clasped, eyes locked, while the crowd erupted into cheers and arguments and celebration around them.

Jon released Dacey's hand reluctantly and turned to find Father descending from the platform, he looked proud.

Grandmother Lyarra descended as well, openly delighted, her grey eyes bright with pride.

Lord Anden's bellow cut through the crowd noise: "HAR! THAT'S HOW IT'S DONE! Maege, you own me five silver stags,"

Derek was grinning like he'd personally won the match, slapping other men on the shoulders and accepting congratulations for his student's performance.

Father reached them first. He looked at both fighters, then nodded slowly.

"Well fought. Both of you." Then he turned to Jon specifically. "You showed patience and discipline. You waited for your opportunities and exploited them decisively. That was the Stark way, and the Flint way combined."

Warmth bloomed in Jon's chest. Father's approval wasn't given lightly or often. To hear it now, publicly, in front of half of Winterfell, that meant something.

Grandmother Lyarra stepped forward, hugging Jon close to her. "My smart boy," she said.

Lady Maege approached with her daughters arrayed behind her. Her daughters seemed soured that their sister had lost, even Alysanne, if anything she seemed more sour than all the others.

"Impressive, Jon Flint," Maege said. "Very impressive indeed."

She turned to Dacey. "What do you think, daughter?"

Dacey was still catching her breath, her face flushed from exertion and probably embarrassment at being beaten so decisively. But when she spoke, there was no bitterness in her voice.

"I think he's better than he looks." She paused, then added with a slight smile: "And he looks pretty damn good already."

Robb pushed through the crowd, grinning broadly. He clapped Jon on the shoulder.

"I won five silver stags betting on you!"

Jon blinked. "You bet on me?"

"Of course I did." Robb laughed. "You're my brother. Of course I bet on you. Even when everyone else was calling you crazy."

"THAT WAS AMAZING!"

Arya burst through the crowd like a small hurricane, her grey eyes bright with excitement. "That was incredible! Teach me! Please teach me that!"

Lady Catelyn tried to grab Arya's arm. "Arya, that's not appropriate—"

"But it was amazing!" Arya protested. "Did you see him move? I want to move like that!"

"Arya—"

Joanna approached, and she too wanted Jon to make those moves again, but unlike Arya who wanted to learn those moves, Joanna seemed to want to see them again.

Dacey walked over to retrieve her morningstar from where it had fallen. She picked it up, then walked back to Jon.

"Next time," Dacey said, "I won't fall for your tricks."

Jon grinned. "Next time, I'll have new ones."

Dacey's smile widened. "I'm counting on it."

They shook hands again, and she winked at him, before letting go of his hand, walking away.

The crowd slowly dispersed toward the Great Keep, voices excited with talk of celebratory drinks and replaying every moment of the fight. Arguments continued about specific techniques, about whether Jon had been lucky or skilled, about what it meant for House Flint's reputation.

Jon remained in the center of the practice yard, standing on the packed dirt where he'd fought. His training armor felt heavy now. His arms ached from the constant work of deflecting Dacey's powerful strikes.

But he'd won.

Ser Rodrik Cassel approached, collecting the practice weapons scattered around the yard. The old master-at-arms paused when he reached Jon.

"Your footwork was exceptional, lad," Ser Rodrik said. "Quick, precise, never wasted a step."

"Derek drilled it into me for years," Jon replied. "Said footwork was more important than sword skill."

"Derek was right. But more than that..." Ser Rodrik's weathered face creased thoughtfully. "Your mind was working the entire time. I could see it. You weren't just reacting, you were setting traps."

Jon nodded slowly. "Derek taught me that fights are won in the head before the body. If you can outthink your opponent, the physical part becomes easier."

"Derek taught you well." Ser Rodrik was quiet for a moment, then added: "You're going to be formidable when you're grown, Jon Flint. Truly formidable. The North needs men who can think and fight both. We have plenty who can do one or the other, but rare are those who master both. Only the best master both, Arthur Dayne, Barristan Selmy, the best knights in History were able to master both."

The old master-at-arms walked away, leaving Jon alone in the practice yard.

Jon's smile widened.

Today had been a good day.

Jon Flint (Daemon Targaryen)



Dacey Mormont (The image is not mine)

