

## 119 Playing Dirty

Eve 1

The moment Hades stepped back, the air between us felt charged, crackling with unspoken tension. My shoulder throbbed like a steady drumbeat, but I clenched my teeth and pushed through it. Showing weakness now would be like bleeding in front of a predator.

"Again," Hades ordered, his voice smooth but commanding. His silver eyes flicked over me, missing nothing. He knew. I could see it in the slight arch of his brow, the curl of his smirk. But he wasn't calling me out on it yet. Why?

I reset my stance, keeping my weight centered, my fists up. His movements were unhurried, deliberate, as though he had all the time in the world to toy with me. I hated it. I hated that he made me feel like a beginner every time I faced him. But it felt good to fall back into our usual routine of banter. It felt... comfortable, no longer unnerving. I hadn't realized how much I missed training with him.

But I hated even more how part of me wanted to impress him. I wanted to prove something to



him.

"Good," he said, circling me like a wolf stalking prey. "Your footing is better. Maybe you did pay attention while I was gone."

I didn't reply. I couldn't. Every ounce of focus was on tracking him, on anticipating his next move. The flicker of his weight shifting forward was my only warning before he lunged.

I ducked low, narrowly avoiding the swipe of his arm, and shot upward with a quick jab aimed at his jaw. He caught my wrist with frustrating ease, his grip firm but not painful.

"Predictable," he murmured, his breath brushing my cheek. He liked that word too damn much.

"Try harder," I snapped, wrenching my hand free and stepping back to reset.

His laughter was soft, amused. "There's the fire I've been waiting for. But if you want to land a hit on me, you'll need to stop hesitating."

"I'm not hesitating."

"You are," he countered, stepping closer, forcing me to backpedal. "Every time you second-guess, you give me an opening. And trust me, Red, someone less patient than me wouldn't let you



off so easily."

"Patient?" I scoffed, pivoting to dodge his next strike. "That's rich coming from you."

He grinned, his fangs flashing. "You have no idea how patient I can be."

My heart stuttered at the dark promise in his tone, but I ignored it, focusing instead on the fight. He came at me again, his attacks faster now, sharper, but I managed to block more of them than before. Each successful deflection sent a spark of satisfaction through me, even if it was short-lived.

"Better," he said, catching my wrist mid-swing. This time, instead of twisting it, he guided my arm downward, using the momentum to turn me around and pin me with my back to his chest. "But still sloppy."

"Get off me," I ground out, struggling against his hold.

"Sloppy," he repeated, ignoring my protests. "Your shoulder's slowing you down. You're compensating with your other side, which makes you predictable."

I stilled, the breath catching in my throat. He



knew.

"Don't look so surprised," he murmured, his tone softer now, almost gentle. "You're good, Red. Better than most, actually. But you can't hide pain from me."

"I'm fine," I insisted, but even I could hear the strain in my voice.

"Sure you are," he said, his grip loosening just enough for me to pull away. "But if you want to survive out there, you need to be more than fine. You need to be ruthless."

He stepped back, giving me space, but his gaze remained locked on mine, unrelenting. "Again," he said, gesturing for me to come at him.

I hesitated for half a second before lunging forward, feinting left and aiming a kick at his side. This time, he didn't catch it. He dodged—barely—and I felt a flicker of triumph before he pivoted and swept my legs out from under me.

"Don't celebrate too early," he said, offering me a hand as I scrambled to my feet.

"I wasn't celebrating," I muttered, ignoring his hand and standing on my own.

"Could've fooled me," he said, smirking. "But I'll

admit—you're learning faster than I expected. Looks like you didn't slack off while I was gone."

I didn't reply, but the corner of my lips twitched upward despite myself.

For the next hour, he pushed me harder, correcting my stance, my timing, my breathing. His comments were sharp, often mocking, but there was an undercurrent of encouragement in them that kept me going. And though his attacks were relentless, he avoided my injured shoulder, almost as if he was... protecting it.

Hades didn't give me a moment to catch my breath. As soon as I straightened up, brushing dirt from my palms, he stepped closer, his eyes gleaming with something dangerous.

"New task," he said, his voice low and smooth, but there was an edge to it that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. "Your goal is simple: make me flinch."

I blinked at him. "Flinch? That's it?"

"That's it," he said, his smirk widening as if he already knew the outcome. "Should be easy, right? Just one little reaction. One tiny sign that you're getting under my skin."



I narrowed my eyes, trying to figure out the catch. "What's the point?"

"The point," he said, circling me again, "is that if you can't make me flinch, you won't stand a chance out there. I'm holding back, Red. The world won't."

I clenched my fists. He always had a way of making everything sound like a challenge—a dare I couldn't back down from. "Fine," I said, resetting my stance. "Let's do this."

He gave a low chuckle, stepping back to give me room. "Go ahead, little wolf. Surprise me."

I lunged without warning, aiming a punch at his jaw. He sidestepped effortlessly, not even a flicker of hesitation in his movements.

"Predictable," he said, his tone dripping with mockery. "You're like an open book, Red. A very short, very boring book."

I ground my teeth and spun, throwing a kick toward his ribs. He blocked it with ease, his smirk never wavering.

"Still predictable," he said, shaking his head. "You've got to think outside the box, Red. Use that clever little head of yours." 1



I stepped back, my breath coming in short bursts as I tried to reassess. He was toying with me, like a cat playing with its prey. And I hated it.

This time, I feinted left, aiming a quick jab at his side before pivoting and throwing my weight into a kick toward his knee. He caught my leg mid-air, holding it firmly as his eyes locked onto mine.

"Better," he said, his voice low and amused. "But not good enough."

He released me with a slight push, and I stumbled back, frustration bubbling to the surface. "Stop calling me predictable!" I snapped, resetting my stance.

"Then stop being predictable," he countered, his tone infuriatingly calm. "You keep attacking where you think I'm weak. But newsflash, Red—I don't have weaknesses."

"Liar," I hissed, lunging at him again. This time, I aimed a series of quick punches, trying to overwhelm him with speed. He blocked every single one with maddening ease, his smirk growing with each failed attempt.

"Is that all you've got?" he taunted, his voice soft and mocking. "Come on, Red. Show me some

bite."

I growled under my breath, pushing harder. My knuckles grazed his side once—barely—but it was enough to make his smirk falter for the briefest second.

"There it is," he murmured, stepping back. "A little fire. But you're still too slow. Too predictable."

"Stop calling me that!" I shouted, lunging forward with everything I had.

He sidestepped again, his movements so smooth it was like he was dancing. Before I could recover, he swept my legs out from under me, and I hit the ground with a thud.

"Temper, temper," he said, crouching down. His grin widened. "And you're predictable."

I wanted to wipe that smirk off his face so badly it hurt. But as I lay there, staring up at him, I realized that was exactly what he wanted. He wasn't just trying to frustrate me—he was testing me. Pushing me.

And I hated that it was working.

"Get up," he said, standing and offering me a hand. "We're not done yet."





I ignored his hand and pushed myself to my feet, brushing dirt from my pants. "Stop calling me that."

"What?" He feigned ignorance. "Predictable?"

"Stop calling me that!" I snarled, every ounce of my frustration pouring out in my voice.

Hades smirked, unbothered, like he always was. "Predictable," he said again, dragging the word out like he was savoring it.

Something inside me snapped. Fine. If he wanted unpredictable, I'd give it to him.

I reset my stance, forcing calm into my breaths even as anger simmered beneath the surface. "Alright," I said, tilting my head and letting a hint of a smirk play on my lips. "One more try."

His silver eyes narrowed slightly, curious but still confident. "Go ahead, Red. Impress me."

This time, I moved slower, more deliberate, as though I were planning another straightforward strike. I lunged forward, aiming a kick high—toward his face. I could see the flicker of recognition in his eyes, the way he anticipated the move. He ducked, exactly as I knew he would, his grin widening like he'd already won.

And then my knee came up hard.

I didn't aim for his stomach. I aimed lower. 5

The impact was solid, the connection so direct that I could feel his entire body tense. A strangled groan escaped him, and for the first time since we started training, Hades staggered, clutching his groin. 2

"Son of a—" His words cut off in a guttural growl as he bent slightly at the waist, his silver eyes glaring daggers at me. The smirk was gone, replaced by something raw, and for a brief, glorious moment, I had the upper hand.

"Flinched," I said, crossing my arms, breathless but triumphant. 2

"You little—" He groaned again, his voice strained as he straightened slowly, still holding his ground despite the obvious pain. 1

I grinned, unable to stop myself. "What was that? I'm sorry, I didn't catch it. Something about me being predictable?"

His glare darkened, a smirk taking over his face. A dangerous one.



## 120 Fighting For The Prize

Eve 1

His grin widened as he stood to his full height, the faintest trace of a grimace disappearing from his expression. "Yes, Red. You won." He paused, his silver eyes narrowing as they pinned me in place. "But at what cost?"

He took a slow, deliberate step toward me, and I instinctively stepped back, a knot of tension coiling in my stomach. His gaze never wavered, a mix of amusement and something darker lurking beneath the surface.

"I'll admit," he began, his voice smooth, dangerously low, "I didn't think you'd stoop to that. But I suppose that's what I love about you, Red—just when I think I've got you figured out, you surprise me." 1

My throat tightened, my pulse quickening under the weight of his words. Love? Did he just say love? I forced myself to focus, to steady my breathing, but the sly curl of his smirk made it nearly impossible.

He tilted his head, his eyes roaming over me, slow and deliberate. "I wonder," he mused, his



voice dropping further, "what else you're capable of with the right... incentive."

A shiver raced down my spine, his tone dripping with suggestion. "Don't push your luck," I said, my voice sharper than I intended. I needed to keep my composure, to show him I wasn't fazed by his words—or the way his eyes seemed to burn into me.

"Luck?" he repeated, the word rolling off his tongue like silk. He stopped just a breath away from me, his proximity setting my nerves on edge. "I don't believe in luck, Red. I believe in potential. And you..." His gaze lingered, his silver eyes glinting with unspoken promise. "... have so much of it. If you'd just let go."

"Let go?" I echoed, narrowing my eyes at him.

"Let go of what?"

He leaned in, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Control. Fear. That little voice in your head that keeps you predictable."

Heat flared in my cheeks at the word, my anger bubbling back to the surface. "I'm not predictable."

He chuckled, the sound low and rich, sending another shiver through me. "Aren't you?" He



raised a hand, brushing a stray strand of hair from my face. The touch was light, almost tender, but it carried an undercurrent of power that made my breath hitch. "Prove me wrong, Red. Show me what happens when you stop holding back." 1

His challenge hung in the air between us, charged and unspoken. I clenched my fists, torn between the urge to rise to it and the instinct to protect myself. But as his smirk deepened, I realized something: he wasn't just testing my strength. He was testing me, my resolve, my limits.

And damn it, I wasn't about to let him win.

"I have seen your strengths and weaknesses, your determination and hesitation," he said, circling me like a predator stalking its prey. "I know where you excel and where you falter. And now, Red, we build on that. The next stage of your training isn't about learning how to fight—it's about learning how to win."

I followed his movements, turning with him to ensure he was always in my line of sight. His presence was magnetic, his gaze piercing, and the weight of his words settled heavily on my shoulders. This wasn't just about sparring



anymore. It was something deeper, more dangerous.

"Winning isn't just brute strength or quick reflexes," he continued, his tone low and deliberate. "It's about strategy. About knowing your opponent—inside and out. Anticipating their every move before they even think of it. That's what separates survivors from victims."

I swallowed hard, his words hitting closer to home than I wanted to admit. "And you think I can do that?"

He stopped, his silver eyes locking onto mine with an intensity that made my breath catch. "I know you can," he said simply, his voice unwavering. "You've already proven you're willing to go to extremes to achieve your goal. But now, I need to see if you're ready to embrace what it takes to truly win."

"And what does that mean?" I asked, my voice steady despite the turmoil brewing inside me.

His smirk returned, sharp and predatory. "It means you're going to learn how to manipulate, how to exploit weaknesses, how to strike where it hurts most. It means shedding whatever illusions you have about honor or fairness. Out



there, Red, there's no room for hesitation or mercy. There's only survival."

I felt a chill run through me, but I stood my ground. "So what's the first step?"

He stepped closer, his gaze softening slightly but losing none of its edge. "The first step is learning to trust yourself. Not me, not anyone else—your instincts, your decisions. Because when the time comes, and it will come, you won't have anyone to fall back on."

I nodded slowly, the weight of his words sinking in. "I'm ready."

His smirk deepened, approval flickering in his eyes. "Good," he said, stepping back and motioning for me to follow him. "Because the next stage will come with a delectable twist."

The way his lips tilted up, told me that the so called "twist" would be anything but pleasant. I raised a brow. "Twist?"

"Yes,"

And in the speed of light, he swallowed the space between us. Suddenly, his arm was around my waist, his hand taking my jaw gingerly and raising it. My back was against his muscles



chest. His head came down to crook of my neck.

I stilled, my heart beating out side of my chest. My skin ...tingled where his breath brushed against it, warm and unsettling. The proximity was intoxicating, and I hated how it made my knees threaten to give out beneath me.

"Your next lesson," Hades murmured, his voice low and laced with something dark, "will be entertaining...for me."

His lips hovered just above my neck, his breath ghosting along my skin, sending shivers racing down my spine. "Right now, your instincts are torn," he continued, his tone almost hypnotic. "Fight me? Run from me? Or..." He let the suggestion hang in the air, unspoken but clear.

I clenched my fists, forcing myself to focus. "Or what?" I snapped, trying to sound defiant, but my voice betrayed a slight tremor.

His chuckle was deep, a rumble I felt against my back. "That, Red, is the question. You tell me. What do you want to do?"

I swallowed hard, my mind racing as his grip around my waist tightened ever so slightly—not enough to hurt, but enough to make me acutely aware of how easily he could overpower me.





"Get off me," I hissed, trying to twist away.

But he didn't budge. Instead, his hand slid from my jaw to rest just beneath my chin, tilting my head slightly to the side. The gesture was both possessive and maddeningly gentle, and it sent another unwanted rush of heat through me.

"You're tense," he murmured, his lips brushing the shell of my ear. "Tension slows you down. Makes you predictable."

"Stop calling me that," I ground out, my voice sharper this time, though I couldn't stop the flush creeping up my neck.

His laughter was soft, almost teasing. "Then stop proving me right."

I hated how his words wormed their way under my skin, how they set fire to something buried deep inside me. He was testing me again, pushing me, daring me to respond.

"Fine," I said through gritted teeth, summoning every ounce of defiance I had. I stomped hard on his foot and twisted out of his hold, spinning to face him with a glare.

He stepped back, his silver eyes gleaming with amusement as he raised his hands in mock



surrender. "Good," he said, his smirk returning. "That's what I'm talking about. Use that fire, Red. Let it drive you. Because the next stage will be truly... something."

"Stop beating about the bush, Hades." I snapped but in my voice was a treacherous tremor.

"You are so excited."

"No," I deadpanned. "Spill it."

He crossed his arms, his smirk deepening. "Every week, we will have a challenge," he said, his tone casual, as if he wasn't about to turn my life into a nightmare.

I narrowed my eyes. "We?" I repeated, suspicion lacing my voice. "You're my coach. Shouldn't this be me doing the challenges and you barking instructions?"

His silver eyes gleamed, a dangerous glint that sent a chill through me. "Where's the fun in that? No, Red, this will be a two-way street. You'll face me in each challenge, and whoever wins..." His voice dipped, his smirk taking on a wicked edge. "...gets to punish the loser."

My breath caught, my stomach twisting at the implications. "Punish?" I echoed, trying to sound



unimpressed. "And what exactly does that mean?"

"Whatever the winner wants," he said smoothly, his gaze locked onto mine. "Think of it as motivation. Push yourself harder, fight smarter, and you won't have to find out."

I crossed my arms, glaring at him. "And what if I win? What's stopping me from punishing you every day for being an insufferable bastard?"

His grin widened, his fangs just visible. "Oh, Red, I'm counting on it. But don't get ahead of yourself—I plan on winning. I already have the perfect punishment for the first challenge you will lose." 2