



## 123 In The Dark

Eve 1

"Sparring blind?" I echoed incredulously.

Hades didn't even look at me as he retrieved cuffs and a black blindfold. "You heard me the first time, Red." He rose to his full height, entering the ring once again. "For the first challenge, you're sparring blind." He reiterated with infuriating calm, as if he hadn't just said the most bizarre thing known to man. So much for leveling the playing field.

I felt a migraine coming on. "I can't believe you," I grumbled.

He raised a clueless brow. "Can't believe what about me exactly?"

I pointed an accusatory finger at him, my voice turning acidic. "They call you the Hand of Death, and you take my sight in a bid to make me lose." After what had happened with Jules just yesterday, I couldn't deal with more suspicions. The paranoia was eating me alive. It was a surprise I hadn't ended up having nightmares.

"So?" he asked easily. "Are you saying you want to



back out? You want to run away?" Mockery seeped into his tone.

I felt the ebbing in my head turn into pulsing. I ran a hand through my hair, trying to ward off the growing ache in my skull, but it did nothing as I stared him down. "I'm not running away, you fucking bastard," I all but growled. I stilled.

What was happening to me? I had grown so irritable and sharp-mouthed. I didn't even have to look in a mirror to know I wouldn't recognize myself. Training with Hades was supposed to help me defend myself—an outlet for the negative emotions slowly eating me alive. But now, it felt like it was pulling something to the surface—a part of myself I hadn't even known existed. 1

I glanced at him, my heart hammering against my ribs. The smirk on his face remained unmoved, as if he wasn't shocked by my outburst. He seemed pleased. He was doing this on purpose. This was what he wanted. In some sick, twisted way, he was molding me.

My eyes narrowed. "Was this your plan all along?"

Hades tilted his head, the faintest flicker of



amusement crossing his face. "What plan, Red?"

I stepped closer, unable to keep the accusatory edge from my voice. "To twist me into... this." I gestured vaguely at myself, frustration simmering beneath my skin. "You keep pushing, provoking—like you're waiting for something to break."

His silver eyes glinted, unreadable as they swept over me. "Maybe I am."

I felt the words like a spark to dry tinder, igniting the fire that had been burning too close to the surface these past few days. "Why?" I demanded. "Why are you trying so hard to turn me into someone else?"

Hades took a slow, deliberate step forward, and despite myself, I matched it with a step back.

His gaze pinned me in place, sharp and wholly wicked. "Because the version of you standing here now isn't enough."

The breath punched out of me. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me." His tone was calm, but the weight behind his words pressed down like iron. "I don't need the Ellen who flinches at shadows and second-guesses herself. I need the Ellen



who survives. The one who doesn't hesitate to bite when someone pushes too hard."

I clenched my fists at my sides. "And if I don't want to become that?" 1

"Then you'll die." His voice was like a cold blade against my skin. "And I don't plan on letting that happen."

A cold silence stretched between us, and for a moment, I couldn't tell if the anger rolling through me was directed at him or at the truth in his words.

"You don't get to decide who I become, Hades," I said, my voice quieter but no less sharp. "You're not fixing me. I'm not broken." 1

His smirk returned, slow and predatory. "Aren't you?"

I hated the flicker of doubt his words stirred.

Before I could respond, he dangled the blindfold in front of me, raising a brow. "Still want to spar, or should I start preparing your funeral?"

I glanced at the cuffs in his hand. "You're taking away my ability to fight back too?" I shook my head. "Why am I not surprised?"

He shrugged before turning his back to me, the



cuffs dangling from his fingers. "They're for me, Red. Do the honors, would you?"

I blinked, caught off guard. "I'll be blindfolded, and you'll be..."

"Cuffed. Yes, Red." 2

I took the cuffs and latched them onto his wrists with a quick snap. He put some space between us before turning to face me. "Now, inject me with the inhibitor." He gestured to the bag.

Dread filled my gut as I followed his gaze, a lump forming in my throat. I opened my mouth to refuse, but when my eyes met his, I saw the warning there. His eyes had darkened to a deep, ominous gray. The threat was clear—inject him, or we'd spar without it. And I would lose.

I didn't wait. I exited the ring and retrieved the black matte box from the bag. My hands shook as I returned, offering it to Hades.

That obnoxious brow rose. "As you can see, my hands are unavailable at the moment." 1

I sighed deeply, rolling my eyes as if my legs weren't threatening to give out under the weight of the moment. I slid the box open, unveiling its sinister contents: a needle and a filled syringe. 2



Tremors passed through me as I took out the instrument and assembled it.

Hades' gaze bore into me, heavy and unrelenting. "You've injected me before. What's the matter now?"

I swallowed hard but didn't answer. The action felt more daunting this time. The adrenaline had worn off, leaving only cold reality behind. I pierced his skin with the needle and pushed the contents in until the syringe was empty.

"Done," I mumbled.

"Your turn, Red," he said softly.

I snatched the blindfold.

The soft rumble of his chuckle followed me as I tied it over my eyes, plunging the world into darkness.

"Good," Hades said, his voice unnervingly close. "Now, let's see how sharp those instincts of yours really are."

I listened intently, trying to track his movements by sound alone. The first brush of air against my left side came too late—Hades' shoulder barely grazed mine before I spun, lashing out blindly.

My fist met nothing but air.



"Focus," he whispered somewhere to my right. I whirled toward his voice.

Another shift, this time behind me. I felt him before I heard him, the heat of his body looming too close for comfort.

I lashed out again, aiming low, but he sidestepped with infuriating ease.

"You're listening for the wrong things," Hades' voice ghosted over my shoulder, his breath a near-whisper against my neck. I spun toward him, but his bound hands brushed lightly over my wrist, twisting me just enough to throw off my balance.

I stumbled, biting back a curse.

"Stop relying on sound alone," he murmured, circling me. His presence was a constant, unnerving pressure in the dark. "Feel the shifts in the air. The vibrations in the floor. You're focusing on my footsteps, but you should be tracking the way I breathe, the heat between us. All the little things you keep ignoring."

I clenched my fists. "I'm not ignoring anything," I lied. He was right. I was only focusing on sound.

"You are."



His voice was so close it sent a jolt down my spine. I swung without hesitation, knuckles grazing the empty space where he'd just been.

A low chuckle echoed from behind me. "You're predictable, Red."

"Stop calling me that." That damn word.

"Make me."

I lunged, ignoring the slight tremor in my muscles. But the second I moved, his leg swept out, knocking mine aside just enough for me to falter. His body pressed into mine, pinning me against the ropes.

"You're hesitating." His breath skimmed the side of my face, and I hated how aware I was of it. Of him. "You won't last long out there if you keep waiting for the perfect moment."

"Get off me," I ground out, twisting in his hold.

But Hades didn't budge. His body pressed lightly against mine, pinning me with an ease that was more infuriating than intimidating.

"You're wasting energy fighting me when you should be conserving it," he murmured. "Relax. If I wanted to hurt you, you'd already be on the mat."



"Comforting," I bit out, squirming under his weight. "Real motivational speech."

His smirk practically radiated through the dark. "You asked for this."

I shoved hard against him, and this time, he let me go. I stumbled back, and just then I felt the tremor on the mat behind me. Instinct kicked in. I swung my leg back, fast and hard.

My foot connected solidly with something. A sharp grunt followed, and Hades fell back onto the mat with a dull thud.

I ripped off the blindfold just in time to see him sprawled beneath me, his bound wrists pinned awkwardly behind him. His silver eyes flicked up to meet mine, narrowed but still glinting with something far too amused for someone who'd just been knocked down.

Before he could recover, I straddled him, planting my knees on either side of his hips and pressing down to keep him pinned.

"Not so smug now, are you?" I panted, strands of hair sticking to my damp forehead. 1

Hades arched a brow, his gaze dragging lazily over me, lingering just a second too long on the



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space between us. "Smug?" His voice was rougher than usual, breathless from the impact. "I'm impressed, Red. Didn't think you had it in you."

I leaned in, letting more of my weight sink onto him. His muscles tensed beneath me, but he didn't resist. "There's a lot you don't know about me."

His lips curled into that damnable smirk. "Is that so?"

I hated how quickly the heat in his eyes made me second-guess what I was doing. How easily the bastard could turn a situation into something else entirely.

"Don't get comfortable," I warned, shifting just enough to press his bound wrists harder into the mat. "You're not going anywhere until you admit I won."

His gaze dragged up to mine. "Then I won't be admitting it anytime soon," he said, voice low and far too smooth. "Because why would I want to go anywhere?"

I froze for half a second, pulse spiking.

The way he said it—slow, deliberate—sent



something flickering dangerously in the pit of my stomach. "You can keep me here as long as you want, Red. I'm not complaining." 3

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## 124 The Onesie

Eve 1

I felt the heat rush to my face, burning from the inside out. Hades' smirk deepened as if he could feel the shift in my pulse, and I hated how smug he looked beneath me.

His silver eyes gleamed in the dim light, half-lidded and unrepentant.

I shifted, trying to pull away. "You're unbelievable."

But the second I moved, my balance wavered. His gaze flicked to my legs, and I realized too late that my knee was too close to slipping.

Damn it.

I tried to catch myself, but the blind panic of stumbling on top of him only made it worse. My palm braced against his chest—broad and infuriatingly solid—and for half a second, I was completely at his mercy.

Before I could push away, I felt the faintest snap.

The handcuffs dangled uselessly from his wrists, broken apart like they were made of twine. 1

His hands shot up, gripping my hips firmly.  
"Careful, Red. Wouldn't want you to fall."

The contact jolted through me like electricity, and I froze, suddenly too aware of the way his fingers pressed into my ass, steadying me with just enough pressure to keep me locked in place. 3

I stiffened. "Hades—"

"Relax." His voice dropped an octave, low and rough. His thumbs brushed along the curve of my waist in slow, deliberate circles. "You're shaking."

I was shaking, but it wasn't from fear. And that irritated me more than anything else.

"You're enjoying this," I accused, pushing against his chest, but he didn't let go.

"Of course I am." His grip didn't falter, not even when I glared down at him. "You're the one straddling me. I'm just being a good sport about it." 1

I leaned in, narrowing my eyes. "Yeah right and the tower of Giza is not leaning." 3

His gaze flicked to my eyes, lingering just a second too long. "Your pupils are dilated."

I stiffened. "So what?"

His hands shot up higher, his grip tightening. His thumbs brushed lazy circles against my waist as he pinned me with that unreadable stare. "Are you excited that you won..." His voice dipped lower, smooth as silk. "Or because—"

"I won the first challenge!" I blurted, cutting him off before he could finish that sentence. No way was I letting him get the satisfaction of drawing this out any longer. 1

He arched a brow, but I jumped off him before he could stop me. 1

"I won!" I practically bounced on my toes, shoving aside whatever the hell that moment was. "I get to punish you."

Hades actually looked... startled. His gaze shuttered and I caught the faintest crease of confusion. 1

Then, slowly, his expression shifted into a smirk. "Punish me, huh?" He sat up, cuffs clattering to the mat beside him. "I am sure you had something truly wicked, something that you believe will be a challenge to---"

"You will wear a unicorn onesie to bed for a week," I blurted. 7

Hades froze.

For the first time since I met him, the Hand of Death—the fearsome king, the man who could make Gammas tremble with just a glance—stared at me in complete and utter horror. 2

His silver eyes blinked once. Slowly.

"You want me to... what?"

I crossed my arms, barely able to suppress the grin stretching across my face. "Oh, you heard me."

He tilted his head, as if trying to process whether I'd suffered a head injury mid-fight. "A unicorn onesie," he repeated, his tone flat. 1

"To bed. For a week." I lifted a finger to emphasize. "Every. Single. Night."

Hades' mouth opened slightly, then closed. For once, words seemed to fail him. His brows furrowed, as if the sheer absurdity of the punishment defied all logic. 2

"You think this is punishment?" His voice was strained, like he was still grappling with reality. "I expected..." He ran a hand through his hair, looking almost disoriented. "Anything but that."

I couldn't help it—I burst into laughter, doubling

over as the image filled my head.

Hades scowled, glaring at me like I'd just kicked him in the pride. "Is this amusing to you, Red?"

"More than you know," I wheezed, wiping tears from the corners of my eyes. "Honestly, I wasn't sure what to expect, but your face right now? Priceless."

He looked at me like I'd summoned an ancient evil. "I thought you'd want me to run laps until I dropped or spar blindfolded for days—not parade around like some... pastel abomination." 3

"Exactly!" I jabbed a finger at him. "You're terrifying, Hades. I'm just leveling the *playing field*." I made air quotes with my fingers.

His eyes narrowed dangerously, but I could see the his eyes twitch—the faintest betrayal of exactly how affected he was by this being the punishment that I had chosen for him. 1

"You think a unicorn onesie will strip me of my reputation?"

I grinned. "No, but I think watching you try to act intimidating while wearing one will be the best entertainment I've had all year."

Hades exhaled sharply, shaking his head,



clenching his hands in his side . "You're enjoying this too much."

"Oh, you have no idea," I said, still riding the high of victory. "And I'm picking it out personally. With a tail and everything."

Hades let out a slow, resigned breath, glaring up at the ceiling like he was questioning every life choice that had brought him to this moment.

"Seven nights." 1

"Yup."

"In a unicorn onesie."

"With glittery stars," I added, practically bouncing on my heels. "Don't forget the horn."

His gaze dropped back to mine, and he leaned forward slightly, eyes glinting. "You realize this means war, right?" 1

I leaned in just as close, meeting his stare head-on. "Bring it."

For a moment, we held eye contact—him, visibly contemplating his life choices, and me, delighting in his rare state of defeat.

Then he rose to his feet, towering over me once more, but the intimidation factor was long gone.



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"I'll wear the damn onesie," he muttered, cracking his neck. "But don't think this is over, Red."

I smirked. "Oh, I'm counting on it."

As he stalked off the mat, I swore I heard him mumble something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like "unbelievable."

But I didn't care.

Because by nightfall, the mighty Hand of Death would be sleeping soundly in a pink unicorn onesie, and I would never let him live it down. 4

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