



## 88 Strength, Coordination and Awareness

*This chapter is dedicated to Monica\_Ceja, thank you so much for giving me my first gift (≧▽≦)* 1

Eve~

Kael pulled back, his jaw tightening as he laced my sneaker back on, his movements precise but gentle. He rose to his feet, extending a hand to help me up. For a split second, I hesitated, the weight of his gaze making my stomach churn. Finally, I took his hand, his grip firm but warm, grounding me as I stood. What I would give to know what he was thinking right now. Did he suspect anything. My heart was racing faster than when I was doing the warm ups.

"That's enough for tonight," he said.

I started to protest. "But we just started. I can—"

"No," he interrupted, his voice resolute yet gentle.

"Training on an injury will only make it worse.

We'll address this properly next time." He soft green eyes hardened before his normal expression returned. "You don't have to prove anything to me, Ellen. Showing up was enough."



"No," he interrupted, his voice resolute yet gentle. "Training on an injury will only make it worse. We'll address this properly next time." He soft green eyes hardened before his normal expression returned. "You don't have to prove anything to me, Ellen. Showing up was enough." No one needed to tell me that I had messed up.

My throat tightened, and I nodded, unsure of what to say. I had underestimated him because of his easy charm. But I was beginning to see why he was Hades' second. He was vigilant.

He moved to grab a small, portable ice pack from a nearby mini-fridge and handed it over. "Ice it when you get back to your room. Fifteen minutes on, fifteen off. Keep it elevated. We'll reassess the day after tomorrow."

"Got it," I muttered, clutching the ice pack in my hands like a lifeline.

Kael grabbed a towel from a rack and slung it over my shoulder. "I'll walk you back."

My head snapped up. "That's not necessary."

"Maybe not," he said, his smirk returning, this time it reached his eyes. "But it's happening but far enough from our fire breathing dragon. Humor me."





Kael fell into step beside me. The tension from earlier ebbed slightly as we walked, his calm demeanor acting as a balm to my frayed nerves.

"You did well today," he said after a beat, his voice low.

I glanced at him, skeptical. "I barely made it through the warm-up."

"Doesn't matter," he replied. "You showed up. That's more than most people do."

A small, unexpected warmth flickered in my chest at his words. I looked down at the ice pack in my hands, the coolness a welcome distraction from the strange vulnerability his praise stirred in me. The steel grey eyes of a particular king flashed in my mind.

The elevator opened and I stepped in but Kael stood grounded where he was. "Rest up. We'll continue."

I smiled relieved. I had been afraid that he would not want to continue. There had been something in his eyes as he had examined my ankle. There was a story there and I knew it. I wondered what's it was. Did it have a large bearing on who Kael had become and who he was now? "You're really committed to this, aren't you?" I asked,

His expression shifted, the teasing glint fading as he met my gaze. "You deserve to know how to fight, Ellen. To stand on your own. No one should ever take that from you again." 4

I swallowed hard, unsure how to respond. It was a far cry from how Hades had reacted. So Instead, I nodded, my fingers tightening around the ice pack.

"Goodnight, Ellen," he said, his voice softer now.

"Goodnight," I murmured, stepping inside and closing the door behind me.

As I leaned against the door, the cool wood pressing against my back, I let out a shaky breath. Kael's words replayed in my mind, intertwining with memories I wished I could bury. But for the first time, they didn't just bring pain—they brought a spark of something else.

Hope.

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The next session was better and the Kael that I knew was back. The one who always seemed to have a joke just on the tip of his tongue.

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When I entered the training deck, Kael was already there, stretching in exaggerated, almost comical movements that made him look like a caricature of a fitness coach. He arched backward with his arms flailing slightly, letting out a theatrical groan.

"You know, Ellen, if you're late again, I'm filing for a new trainee," he said, straightening and grinning at me. "One who doesn't make me wait and risk pulling a hamstring trying to pass the time."

I rolled my eyes but couldn't help the smile that tugged at my lips. "I'm two minutes early."

"Time is relative," he shot back. "To me, you're late. But fine, since you're here, we can get started. Let's see if you've got what it takes to survive my totally humane training methods."

"Should I be worried?" I asked as I dropped my water bottle onto the bench.

"Absolutely," he deadpanned. "But only if you hate fun."

Kael clapped his hands, commanding attention like a teacher addressing an unruly class. "Alright, the focus of our three next sessions are strength, coordination, and awareness. First up, we're



I dropped into a squat, trying to mimic the stance he demonstrated. My knees wobbled, and Kael's observant gaze immediately zeroed in. I knew he was about to make a joke and I actually anticipated it.

"Stop, stop, stop," he said, waving a hand dramatically. "Are you squatting or auditioning for a duck impersonation? Because that's some serious wobble going on." 1

I glared at him but bit back a laugh. "Sorry, not all of us are born with perfect balance, Mr. Gym Rat."

Kael smirked, stepping behind me. "Balance comes with practice, Your highness. Shift your weight into your heels and engage your core. Imagine sitting back into an invisible chair. And try not to fall over—we don't have enough ice packs for that."

I adjusted my stance, following his instructions. It still felt awkward, but by the third rep, I was starting to get the hang of it. Kael stayed close, throwing out encouragement sprinkled with his usual humor.

"Good! Now don't let your knees cave in. Unless you're planning to start a new trend in bad



"Good! Now don't let your knees cave in. Unless you're planning to start a new trend in bad posture."

After the squats, he moved on to push-ups. I groaned before I even hit the floor.

Kael crouched beside me, watching as I lowered myself toward the mat. "Remember, elbows close to your body. None of that flaring out nonsense. Unless you're trying to take flight, in which case, I'm happy to call you a cab to the nearest runway." 3

I rolled my eyes. "You really enjoy hearing yourself talk, don't you?"

"It's one of life's few pleasures," he said with a grin. "Now focus, or I'll start singing motivational songs, and I promise, I'm tone-deaf." 2

Despite myself, I laughed, which didn't help my form. My arms shook as I tried to keep up, and Kael's constant commentary was both annoying and endearing.

"Eight, nine... ten! And you didn't even collapse. Not bad, rookie," he teased as I flopped onto the mat, panting. "Though your face is about five shades redder than it was five minutes ago. Do you need water? A fan? A stretcher?" 3



"How about a new trainer?" I shot back, wiping sweat from my forehead.

He grinned, unrepentant. "Too late. You're stuck with me."

Next session came with coordination drills. Kael set up a zigzag pattern of cones and demonstrated how to weave through them with what I could only describe as show-off levels of agility.

"Your turn," he said, stepping back with a flourish. "Don't worry if you mess up. I'll only laugh a little." 1

I shot him a mock glare before starting the drill. My first attempt was, predictably, disastrous. I nearly tripped over the second cone and stumbled through the rest like a baby deer learning to walk.

Kael doubled over, laughing. "Oh, that was gold. Are we training for a fight, or are you preparing for a slapstick comedy routine? Either way, you're nailing it."

I glared at him, but the humor in his tone made it impossible to stay mad. "Let's see you do better," I challenged, crossing my arms.

He raised a brow, grinning. "Ellen, I just did it





He raised a brow, grinning. "Ellen, I just did it perfectly, but if you want me to show you up again, I'm happy to oblige."

I groaned, rolling my eyes. "Forget it. I'll get it this time."

And I did. By the fourth attempt, I was weaving through the cones with more control, Kael clapping slowly in mock applause when I finished.

"Look at you," he said, grinning. "Graceful as a swan. Or at least a swan that's had a bit too much to drink, but hey, progress!" 6

Each day that I did not have training, I always anticipated the next day. There was freedom in failing and winning at the things that I was directed to do. The training felt tough and I embraced the horrendous aching at least I felt something other than I certainty and heartache all the time. Training was something that I looked forwards to especially with me and Kael's witty banter. He was so easy and friendly, but efficient yet he never undermined my slow progress.