

Grasping The Weapon

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Walking across the floor of the colossal hangar bay feels like navigating a forest. On every side, the legs of iron titans stretch up to the sky, and up above their hulking bodies blot out the distant overhead lights. The hangar is a space scaled to proportions so far beyond that of a single person that it becomes unnerving, hostile. It's all the worse when you think about how all these mechanical trees can move.

Normally, like any reasonable person, Sergeant Meetra Kotys dislikes it here. It's uncomfortable even for a pilot, at least until she is strapped into her other body. Her war body, her machine body. It's one of the ones looming overhead, although Kotys can't pick it out at the moment. It's standard-issue and just like the others, an Imperial AS *Doru*, special simply because it's hers.

In the hangar, only the monstrous *Ancyor* stands apart from the rest. Normally, Kotys hates to look at the thing. Today, it makes her smile.

And today, as she walks, Kotys leaves her mark on the hangar's vast space. She *clacks* her boots on the ground, marking each step with a sound that echoes far too far, blasphemous in its loudness. It reminds Kotys of how the handler walks. For herself, at least, she knows it's just an affectation, but it's one she feels entitled to. Sergeant Kotys

is overcome with daring.

What happened the day before, after the battle, with the hound, changed her. She can feel it. Hell, everyone can feel it. Since then, the other pilots in Kotys's unit have given her a wide berth. They don't want to speak with her. This morning, in the canteen, they wouldn't sit at the same table. As a soldier, sticking out from the pack isn't smart, normally, but Kotys has evolved beyond caring. It doesn't matter to her if they want to do this school clique bullshit, and it doesn't matter to her if they're scared of her or creeped out by her.

After all, that's just another thing that reminds her of the handler. That's how everyone feels about the handlers.

And, fuck, if nothing else, what a feeling! It was so worth it. Even if it came to nothing, it was worth it. Even if it got her executed - maybe even then, it would have been worth it. Kotys had never imagined that Sartha fucking Thrace, out of everyone, would be the catalyst for her ascension; for her claiming the fate, the specialness, she'd known since girlhood was hers. But inside her warm, wet, receiving mouth Kotys touched something beautiful and now she is so very hungry for more.

That is why the handler has summoned her to the Kennels. She could tell. It has passed between them. They are of a kind now.

The Kennels are beneath the rest of the base, on a lower level accessible only through a tunnel on the floor of the hangar. It makes the Kennels feel like a dungeon, although Kotys knows that it is mostly simply a prudent separation. It's best the other soldiers on base not think too much about the Kennels' dogs.

The tunnel is dark and unnervingly clean, and takes Sergeant Kotys deeper. Eventually there is a door, big and heavy, and Kotys is still deciding whether to knock

or announce herself when it opens to receive her.

Beyond is an office that is almost normal. It was too luxurious, though, and unnerving in its details, especially the warren of claustrophobic passageways that Kotys can see leading off from it, each one lined with cells and other, more sinister facilities. There's no time to dwell on that, though, because the handler from yesterday is standing there, waiting for her.

Behind the handler stands Sartha Thrace.

Sergeant Kotys can't look anywhere but at her. She looks the same as yesterday, but different. The same clothing, the same face, the same muzzle, but there is nothing lurking behind those things. She's too placid and her eyes register no curiosity at Kotys's arrival; instead she's still staring at a wall, looking but not seeing.

Kotys has seen other dogs before, on the base, between missions. They're always like this. They're... dormant is the word, she guesses. God knows what it takes to reduce a person to this for days, weeks on end. Heavy tranquilizers are the least unsettling possibility. Dormancy makes sense, even if it is creepy as shit. It's like looking at a ghost instead of a human being, so numb you'd think their skin was cold to the touch.

There is one particular detail that stands out to Kotys, red-hot, bright as a fresh brand. Amongst the bruises and scars and war wounds on Thrace's face, one is special. A split lip. It wasn't there when she dismounted her *Ancyor* yesterday. It's Kotys's handiwork. She'd been too rough with the barrel of her handgun.

It's her mark.

That gets Kotys excited. It gets her wet.

But the handler cannot be ignored for long. Her presence is overbearing. Platinum hair and fair skin aside, all of her is black, from her cap to her leathers to her hulking coat. It's a uniform, of a kind. It makes handlers look like fear itself, although Kotys is no longer scared. She envies it, and she envies the way that just from how she's standing, it's obvious that Thrace is hers; her thing, her creature.

"Sergeant Meetra Kotys," the handler says. Her expression is another thing Kotys envies. It's powerful in its detached, knowing amusement. "Tell me, why have you come here?"

Kotys salutes, of course. "Reporting as ordered, sir," she responds crisply.

The handler waves her hand in that way that means 'at ease'. "Is that the only reason why?"

"No, sir." Kotys chooses her words carefully. "I'm... curious."

That gets a small laugh, but not an unkind one. "You were more than curious yesterday, I think."

"Yes, sir." Kotys hopes she isn't blushing. She might be. It's too cold down here to tell.

"I am inclined to indulge your curiosity." Kotys can't tell if the handler is mocking her. "Ask."

There is a question that burns a hole in Kotys's mind more than any other. Maybe the handler already knows what it is. She glances at Thrace again. "Does... it always feel like that?"

The handler laughs. It's an approving laugh, maybe. She is a difficult woman to read. "Perhaps. That depends on a great many things. On your perspective."

"My perspective, sir?"

"It's what I've ordered you here to assess." The handler opens her hands, inviting. "And with it, your suitability."

Jubilation surges inside Kotys. She knew it. Yesterday was her moment, and this is her chance. She lets herself grin; surely this handler was once here, in her place, surely she once knew how it felt.

Kotys salutes too, of course. "I'll do everything I can to live up to your expectations, sir."

"Hm," is all the handler says to that. "Then let's begin with some simple instruction." She gestures to Sartha Thrace. "What is she?"

Kotys cannot help but flush with the memory of her, and vibrates the way any eager student would. She remembers this well, and will never forget it.

"She isn't Sartha Thrace," Kotys recites. "Not anymore. She isn't even a person."

"I'm glad you were listening," the handler says. "But that's only what she is not. Now tell me what she is."

Kotys winces. She should have foreseen the real thrust of the question. It was never going to be this easy. She isn't in basic anymore. She needs to do better, and so she looks at Thrace more closely. There is another obvious answer, but if this is a

riddle and she is chosen, then her obvious answer might be the truth.

“She’s a dog,” Kotys answers. “A hound.”

The handler laughs again. This laugh is less kind.

“A child could see that.” Handler reaches up and touches Thrace’s muzzle. She dotes on her for a long moment, caressing where iron meets skin. That brings Thrace to life, just a little, just enough to nuzzle back, the ghostly nothing on her face becoming a ghostly smile.

“A pet,” Kotys corrects herself hastily. “Your hound.”

“No.” The handler’s sharpness cracks like a whip across Kotys’s pride. “Think. Feel. Don’t just blurt out whatever comes into your head.”

Kotys tries to think. She forces herself, as hard as it is with humiliation still echoing through her. No defeat in combat has ever tasted so sour. “She’s an enemy. A rebel. We must always remember that.”

“Wrong,” the handler tells her flatly. “She is broken. Domesticated.”

Now Kotys starts to panic. She’s scrambling. What else is Sartha Thrace? “A... a pilot. That’s why she’s useful to us.”

The handler sighs, and the regret on her face makes Kotys wince. “Close enough, I suppose. She is useful to us, yes. A tool. A single cog, in the empire’s machine of war. She is a weapon. A thing to be used.”

Kotys nods as if she understands, but she can’t help but rile against the unfairness

of it. How was she supposed to guess that answer, of all answers?

“And,” the handler adds, “what are you, Sergeant Meetra Kotys?”

She feels able to relax into this answer. “I’m like her, sir. A cog in a machine.”

It’s a good soldier’s answer, one drilled into her ever since basic. Which makes it all the more dispiriting when the handler sneers as if disgusted.

“I hope not,” the handler tells her. “If you’re just a cog in a machine then you are wasting my time.”

“I’m a pilot.” Kotys’s hands are balled into petulant little fists at her sides. “Sir.”

“How curious.” The handler’s smile is back, and it is not welcome. “You said that she’s a pilot. Does that make you like her?”

“No!” Kotys yells. “Fuck no!”

Where is the handler from yesterday? The one who gave her permission. The one who shared that knowing smirk with her. The one who baptized her. It’s the same woman, but now she’s like a demon. It’s like Kotys is her victim instead of Thrace. Instead of the enemy.

“No,” the handler muses. “No, I suppose not. After all, Sartha Thrace is an undisputed ace. She’s one of the greatest pilots the Earth has ever seen. I thought it best to stop her from counting her kills, but I’m sure her tally would be in the hundreds.”

As she says this, she’s caressing Thrace again. She goes further, bringing her hand

up to stroke and mess her hair, and then down to scratch gently behind her ears. Like everything else between them, it's ghoulish. A kind of fondness only fit for beasts. You'd never treat a person that way. A person would never let themselves be treated this way.

But from the dreamy smile on Sartha Thrace's face, it's clear she's in heaven. Kotys doubts she knows where she is, or if it's day or night, but she knows that her handler, the center of her world, is praising and adoring her.

She looks like she's about to cum.

"And then there's you," the handler says to Kotys, her voice freezing over. "I reviewed your file. You are average. A pilot of unremarkable skill. You have reasonable experience, but no particular accolades or achievements. There is nothing to distinguish you from any other pilot."

That stings worse than anything else, and the deepest pain is that there is nothing Kotys can call upon to answer her. There's nothing she can do at all, except stew. Under the weight of her own impotence, her anger curdles into petty, uncontrolled frustration. It feels like tears are about to well up in the pilot's eyes and she hates herself for that. She doesn't just cry. She's no crybaby.

It's the handler, of course. She has that way about her. She makes you care about what she thinks. It's an awful power.

Kotys decides to let herself get angry instead.

"I didn't come here to be abused," she says. "*Sir*. And I didn't come here to play games. You seem to know exactly what you think I am. So tell me."

The handler let out a long, loud laugh. Kotys hopes that she wasn't simply testing to see if Kotys would eventually stand up for herself. That's the very worst and most cliché kind of test. A stupid person's idea of a smart trick.

"You're a person, Sergeant Kotys." The handler shows teeth. "Or at least, that's what I'm hoping."

Kotys simply blinks.

"A tool needs a hand," the handler explains. "A wielder. You can't own another human being's soul if you're just a cog in a machine. You must demonstrate that you're capable of grasping the weapon."

"I am, damn it!" Kotys knows she is. She feels it deep within herself. It's a power she's already tapped into once. "You've seen that I am. You know I am. That's why you called me here, right? So just tell me how to fucking prove it."

The handler takes her time in answering. She turns her back and walks over to her desk, Sartha Thrace following at her heel. She carefully picks up something, a small case, and then opens it and turns to face Sergeant Kotys once again.

"You have to stake your humanity."

Inside the case is an old-fashioned metal needle and syringe, menacingly long and thick, and contained within the tube, visible through a slim glass panel, is a liquid so green it is plainly unnatural.

Something about it makes Kotys shiver.

"What is that?" she demands. "Is it..."

Her eyes betray her, and she glances nervously at Thrace.

“A tool,” the handler tells her. “One of many. There are other drugs and other methods. Perhaps soon, you’ll be instructed in their use. If.” The handler’s smile curls. “If you’re what I hope you are.”

“A person, right?” Kotys grimaces. She doesn’t know how the hell this is meant to prove that, but she knows one thing: she’ll succeed. She’s special. She’s different. There were two dozen pilots watching Sartha Thrace and the handler the day before. She alone stood forward. That means something. “Fine. Let’s do it.”

As much as she dreads the green fluid she can see sloshing around in the large syringe, part of her is hoping that the handler will lash out and jab it into her before she can think twice. There’s no such kindness. Instead, the handler simply offers it to her. Kotys takes it, of course.

“In the neck,” she instructs. “Find your large vein.”

Like any pilot, Kotys has done enough medic training to know how. When you’re sealed into a cockpit, it’s not like anyone else is going to be there to patch you up. Carefully, she curls her fingers in the metal loops of the syringe and brings the needle’s point against her skin. She pauses. She breathes.

This is just another battle. When she says it herself like that, adrenaline is her ally. It gives her the courage to make herself grin and look the handler dead in the eyes.

Then, she pushes the needle into her skin and pushes down on the plunger with all of her strength.

She's used combat stims before, so the sensation of something cold flowing in her veins isn't unfamiliar. Neither is the sudden, uncomfortable awareness of her heartbeat that it brings. Kotys closes her eyes to balance herself. One beat of her heart brings the drug into her chest. The next expels it and sends it rushing throughout her body. Kotys feels *something*. But what? Is it the weakness in her legs? The tingling in her fingertips? How long does it take this drug to take effect?

Kotys is getting lightheaded. As moments pass, she's increasingly certain of that. She feels herself spinning even with both feet firmly on the ground. The shape of the room around her is disappearing into nothing. She needs to open her eyes, but when she does, she seems Handler.

Handler is made of stars.

Kotys has seen stars just once, transiting from orbit. From the surface, they're almost never visible through the dust storms. That memory has always stayed with her, and she feels it again as she looks at Handler now, every point on Her skin twinkling with light. She is flesh and blood and stars, and when She looks intently at Kotys, the drugged pilot feels the entire weight of the cosmos bearing down on her.

"Good," Handler says, after peering at Koty's pupils. Kotys flinches under Her gaze. "You're taking to it well, I see."

Kotys nods, because how can she do anything else? She's so small.

"Then let's begin," Handler says. Kotys is losing herself in Her smile. "Down."

"D-" Handler's words snatch back Kotys's attention. "W-what?"

"On the ground." Handler helpfully indicates with Her hand. "Down. Now."

It does not occur to Kotys that disobedience is a possibility. She's a leaf in a stream, and Handler is the current. When Handler tells her to go down, it's like she's feeling gravity for the very first time. And so, she sinks unsteadily to her knees. The ground is hard and cold but she's numb to all of that. The numbness is a reminder of the drug coursing through her veins, otherwise seductively easy to forget.

"You're much more obedient than you were yesterday," Handler comments. "Aren't you, dog?"

Kotys slow-blinks again. Dog? This feels like something she should question, but it's hard to be sure. She's trying to find her booze legs but being drunk has never been this confusing. "I'm... a...?"

"A dog," Handler confirms for her. "You're a dog."

This thunderous proclamation rolls slowly through Kotys's mind. Once again, disobedience or disagreement does not occur to her as a possibility. Not when it's coming from this god-like, star-like woman who sounds so implacably certain. Instead her mind buckles, warping itself into a new shape, and 'dog' is its central pillar.

How does that feel? Kotys can't decide. It feels humiliating, vaguely, but she's numb even to that, and being upset with it strikes her as just as futile as being upset at the weather. She is a dog. It's a brute fact, even if it's also a new one. But what does that actually mean? She doesn't know, and the uncertainty makes her nervous. This is too important not to know.

So, she glances, again, at Sartha Thrace. The hierarchy between them, so sure and vivid until moments ago, is now in question. But maybe this other dog, this hound, will help her understand.

“No,” Handler adds, Her voice firm. She repeats things, the way you do with stupid children. Or pets. “No. No, not like her.”

Kotys slumps. If not like her, then what? She’s becoming desperate to understand. Ever since she walked in, she’s been craving Handler’s approval, but now the need for her smile, her nod, her agreement has become all-encompassing. The lack of that is like a physical pain, like her stomach is cramping up from famine. It’s the one thing she’s not numb to.

“She’s a hound,” Handler explains kindly, as Kotys just looks up at her, stupefied. She reaches for Thrace once more, petting, fawning, and now Kotys wishes so very badly that it could be her instead. She wants that care from Handler. That love. “She’s well-trained. I domesticated her myself, and she has never let me down since. My hound is a very, very good girl.”

A little whine threatens to escape Koty’s throat. She can only imagine the perfect, encompassing affirmation that such a comment might bring. It would be enough to warm her through any cold. She’s drowning in longing.

“But you?” Handler’s attention falls back on Kotys, and it is cold. “You aren’t trained. You aren’t domesticated. You are not special. You are nothing. Just an average pilot.”

Kotys thought that comment had hurt before. Now, it stings infinitely worse. She doesn’t have anger to insulate her. She can’t be angry. Not at Handler. In her eyes, Handler is still all stars and light.

“You’re no hound,” Handler mocks - and it is mockery, her tone makes that plain. The cruelty of it is unbearable. “You’re a mutt.”

At this, Kotys doubles over in anguish. The approval she craves has never felt further away. She's left with nothing. She's a mutt. She's a mutt, and Sartha Thrace is a hound. That's a fresh knife into her heart. She's lower than Thrace now, and she's already seen how low Thrace can be. A broken thing with a broken mind, but Kotys is lower still. How will Handler ever love her if she's just a mutt?

"So." Handler folds Her arms as if the matter is settled. As if Kotys is a piece of trash She's thrown away. "What do you want, mutt? What are you doing here?"

Kotys has to answer, because Handler's questions need to be answered. To do that she needs to peer inside herself, and to her surprise, that rouses something. A memory. An impulse. She was here for something, before the drug and before she awoke to Handler's true greatness.

She's here to prove her humanity.

Only now does she realize what that means, but the realization doesn't make the task seem easier. Her humanity has never felt further away. Hasn't she already given in? She's on the floor like a dog, just because Handler told her that's what she is. Wouldn't it be easier to just let herself sink into the abasement? She's touched a hint of the bliss that comes with it, and it's just as dangerously alluring as what she touched the day before, with her gun in Sartha Thrace's mouth.

But something inside Sergeant Meetra Kotys isn't ready to give up that easily. She's a pilot, after all.

So, she dares to straighten her back and look up. "I'm n-not," she says, in a drooling, unsteady voice, her conviction already wavering in the face of Handler's glorious stature, "a m-mutt."

Handler just hits her.

Kotys barely feels the blow, and only pieces together what happened once she's already sprawled out on the ground. But the reprimand of being struck by Handler - that hurts. Handler is special. She's made of stars. She's at the center of the world. And She hit her.

The tears start forming behind her eyes again.

"You're a mutt." Handler's words are thunderous, even though she doesn't raise her voice. She doesn't need to. "That's all you'll ever be."

It's a gut punch far worse than Handler's clean blow to the side of Kotys's face. She whimpers, and can't help but notice how pathetic and canine she sounds. But still, she finds something stubborn within herself, and lifts her head.

"N-n-nooo," Kotys tries to insist.

Handler advances on her, and with each step, the weight of Her presence bears down on Kotys. It's like gravity is getting stronger, pulling her downward, encouraging her to slump to the floor and plead and beg. It's frightening and awe-inspiring and beautiful all at once. Kotys has never known a woman like this. A woman with the gravity of stars at Her command. It feels like blasphemy to question her. Like hubris.

"You're a mutt," Handler insists. The fact that She needs to repeat herself makes Kotys feel shameful in her stupidity. "I saw you, yesterday. I know what you are. You're just an animal who couldn't resist her own urges. You couldn't control yourself. Just a beast in heat."

To punctuate Her statement, to make sure even a stupid dog like Kotys understands, Handler takes a deliberate step forward and places her boot between Kotys's thighs.

Kotys's clothes do nothing to dull the sensation. Her drug-induced numbness is instantly a thing of the past. She wasn't horny before, as far as she can tell, but she sure is now, more than she's ever been before. This arousal is different. Special. Because of Handler. It's not just that there's something against her, touching her. It's that it's Her. Her touch is a blessing. Even when it's cruel.

"Go ahead." Handler's lips curl up into that mocking smile that Kotys still adores. "You know what you want to do. I'm giving you permission."

Kotys's body betrays her with a twitch, and the twitch brings bliss as the single, half-voluntary movement presses her cunt against Handler's boot. They both know what she wants, and the knowledge that Handler is giving her permission is nothing but torment. The voice of temptation is already whispering to her, telling her just once, one time, maybe it'll take the edge off, and when her head is full of clouds and haze it's very hard to remember that the voice of temptation isn't all she has. Isn't this right, for a dog like her?

But she knows that if she does it just once, one time, she'll never be able to stop.

And there's no mistaking what that would mean.

Kotys can't quite bring herself to pull away, though.

"Oh?" Handler laughs at her paralysis. "Little mutt doesn't know what she's doing, does she?"

“Iiii...” Kotys can’t speak when Handler is this close. Her mouth is dry, and the words just drool uselessly out of her mouth as soon as she opens it. Words are so far beyond her now.

“What’s the matter?” Handler’s cruel delight is plain, and that’s another temptation. It’s tempting to give in, just to delight Her more. “Don’t you want to enjoy your treat?”

There is no chance that Kotys can deny wanting Handler right now. So instead, she just whines.

“I guess not,” Handler decides for her. She retracts Her boot. Another whine. “Perhaps you’re more interested in my hound instead, like you were yesterday.”

Kotys groans like a drunk. She doesn’t know anymore, and it’s easier to just wait for Handler to tell her. That’s always easier, for dogs. The emptiness inside her head keeps getting worse. She realizes she’s only just hitting the peak. She needs to remember what she came here for.

“Sartha.”

Handler makes an expectant tongue-clicking noise, and that seems to rouse Sartha Thrace. Her eyes clear of fog, if not of delusion. It’s not like waking up, really. She doesn’t look around to get her bearings. She looks up at Handler, and an expression dawns on her face that’s so hopeful it’s almost pleading. Kotys knows exactly what Thrace is hoping for. She’s hoping for an order, because an order is a chance to win Handler’s approval.

It’s disturbing to Kotys how effortlessly she understands Thrace now.

“Sir?” Thrace ventures eagerly.

"Off The Leash."

Before her eyes, Thrace transforms. No. Thrace dies. Kotys catches it; the moment her eyes go wide and dark before the whole of this woman, this hero, crumbles from within. Implosion follows. She goes slack, loose, empty. A shell. A scarecrow. It's terrifying to behold, like the death of a sun. It makes Kotys tremble. It's not exciting the way it was before. It's too close to home.

But then she comes to life again with a false life, so artificial and constructed the strings are all but visible. Her shoulders slump lazily and her mouth hangs open. There's a light there, a spark, but it's Handlers; an electric candle facsimile of a soul. In a way, it's brighter than before. She's more alert. More aware. But in another way, she's so much dimmer. Her thoughts are crude and simple. She growls instead of speaking.

This is Hound.

She is not pleased to see Kotys. There's something vicious and possessive about the way she leans close to Handler and glares at Kotys, her lips pulled back in a snarl. She's territorial.

A dog who's caught the scent of a rival dog.

"This is what you want, correct?" Handler says to Kotys. As She does She pets Thrace's head, and that takes the edge off her snarl. "I know how much you pilots love to blow off steam and compare body counts. Maybe you're not so average in that department, mutt. You seemed keen enough with my hound yesterday. Perhaps you need her to scratch your itch?"

Each of Her words is dripping with mocking condescension and it makes Kotys churn with conflicting emotions. She doesn't want Handler to mock her. She wants Handler to love her, the same way She loves Her hound. But mockery is still attention, and this attention in particular makes Kotys's brain buzz with something warm and suffocating.

Wait. No. She doesn't want Handler to love her. She wants Handler to... what? To accept her? To train her? To respect her? It's slippery. But she needs to try to keep hold of it.

"N. Nnnooo," Kotys forces herself to say. It wants to come out as a pathetic bleat. Or a bark.

"I think you do." When Handler decides for her, the decision is settled. "Hound."

Hound goes very still as Handler calls her to attention.

Handler's smile goes very thin and wider than ever as she nods to Kotys. "Fuck her."

Kotys isn't prepared for what happens next. Hound flies at her faster than she can think. There's nothing to hold her back - no shame, no inhibition, no self-preservation. Just a fervent need to obey and please. Hound throws herself on top of Kotys, pinning her to the ground, and is on her in a frenzy, hands tearing and muzzle scraping. It's like how she's forgotten how to remove clothes, and so instead she's just tugging and ripping until buttons pop and seams come apart.

And Kotys can't resist, because she's blinded by starlight.

Now even Hound seems like she's made of stars. She's not Handler, of course. She's

not special like Handler. But she's an instrument of Handler's will and, perhaps because of that, she partakes in some of Her radiance. She's flush with it; it makes her seem faster, stronger, harder to fight.

Or maybe it's just the way she's already forcing a hand between Kotys's legs, touching her, forcing her way inside her, forcing her to feel just how greedy her own body is. The pleasure alone is blinding. She held back from the edge earlier, with Handler. Now Hound is going to make sure she falls.

Kotys doesn't notice herself making noise before she notices her throat has started to hurt from moaning.

Even in her drugfucked brain, she hasn't lost sight of how humiliating this reversal is. Just one day ago, she'd had her gun in Hound's mouth. She'd watched Hound suck and mewl and drool and it had felt glorious. She'd felt like she mastered her. Like she'd finally beaten the great Sartha Thrace - if not in combat, then in something even more fundamental.

But now she's the one mewling.

So maybe it was nothing. A fluke. Or worse, a gift. Handler's charity. Power that wasn't real. That feels more true now, now that she's dripping on Hound's hand while the brainwashed hero puts savage, messy hickeys all over her collar. Hound is rougher than any woman Kotys has ever had. She was told to fuck Kotys, but not to be gentle about it. This barely feels like sex. It feels like rutting.

Handler stands above it all, watching, her smile unreadable. She ordered this depravity, but she isn't tainted by it. Not one fleck of dirt or drool or wetness has soiled her boots. She's judging Kotys, of course, and that makes her feel all the more like a goddess.

Kotys can't meet her gaze. She can just arch her back and buck her hips and moan and drool and scream and try her hardest not to beg for more.

She's going to lose.

She can feel that more keenly now than ever. She's already hitting her limit. Hound is teasing it out of her. If Kotys cums, if she cums from this, then there's truly no difference between the two of them. If she cums from this, she's truly a mutt. She'll have lost something forever, she feels. In Handler's eyes especially.

And then... what? She'll just go back to her dormitory and her unit. They'll take her back, probably. They'll pretend to forget. It'll be like nothing ever happened. Except for the moments she thinks back and remembers the time she touched glory and let it slip through her fingers. In those moments, she'll know that she failed to become what she was always meant to be.

Sergeant Meetra Kotys can't face that.

She digs deep within herself and finds reserves - not of dignity, but of strength, and a ferocity close to that she can see on Hound's face. Acting on some instinct that Handler's drug hasn't quite dulled, she reaches up and puts her hand into Hound's matted blonde hair, and makes a tight fist. Hound steels herself, ready to resist if she's pushed away, but Kotys isn't pushing away.

She's pushing down.

Hound isn't ready for this and so, for just a moment, her balance slips. She's still fighting tooth and nail but Kotys is no slouch in a brawl, and the lapse lets her shove Hound far enough down that she can hook her thighs around her head and trap her

there. It doesn't bring any relief - Hound's hand is still halfway inside her cunt - but it helps her bruised ego.

Hound is furious. She writhes like a kicked dog, but she can't really fight back. Handler told her to fuck Kotys, and Handler hasn't told her she can stop. At least half her attention is on keeping her hand moving and bringing Kotys to the edge.

An addled grin comes to Kotys's face as she sees Hound accept this new position. It's not much, but it's something. A foothold. That victory immediately goes to her head. She turns euphoric. The drug makes it easy to let the feeling sweep her away. It helps that this is what Handler wants from her too. A turning of the tables. It's starting to make sense. This is how she proves her humanity.

She needs to show Hound who's really the mutt.

That strengthens her resolve. Now, riding high on dominance, she can simply do what comes naturally. Kotys reaches her other hand down and slips her fingers through the thin metal bars of Hound's muzzle. Then, once her grip is solid, she pulls. Hard.

Hound lets out two cries as the muzzle, already punishingly tight, slips free and goes flying across the room. The first is pain. The second, louder and worse, is from grief and fear and uncertainty. Kotys is sure Handler doesn't let her be without her muzzle. But she doesn't care. She needs to prove that Handler isn't the only one in charge, as blasphemous as that might feel. She forces Hound's face between her legs.

"Here," she growls. "Lick."

Kotys squeezes down with her thighs to make sure Hound cannot possibly escape. Hound whines a few times, but eventually accedes. She's been told to fuck Kotys and

she'll obey, even if her tongue is all she can use. When Kotys feels it inside her, it's so good she starts to laugh and giggle. This is even better, maybe, than making her suck her gun barrel. This is true mastery.

Sartha Thrace, the rebel hero, obediently licking her cunt.

"That's better," Kotys snarls. "Lick, bitch."

Dominating the hound between Kotys's legs is effortless now. She's found her flow. She's not sure if the drug is wearing off or simply taking her to fresh heights, but she feels more focused than ever. Now it's like she's the one made of stars. She can do anything. Already, she's picturing herself in Handler's garb, in that black coat and cap and boots.

Maybe Hound is picturing her that way too. Maybe that's why she seems so servile now. She's pressing her face into Kotys's body, greedily licking and lapping, tonguefucking her like it's the only way she can breathe. Hound has accepted her place. Her purpose.

Pleasing Kotys.

It's something close to the thrill of piloting a mech. Every pilot knows it; the feeling of striding across the world like a god, armored in invincible steel, armed with the power to blow mountains apart. It's the thrill of domination. Kotys knows a lot of pilots who sleep around, but she doesn't know any who'd take sex over the chance to put an enemy machine in the dirt. It's just that addictive.

Kotys has always been an average pilot. Fine. She can accept that. But now she sees. Piloting was never her true calling. This is.

And it's better.

Kotys rolls over suddenly, keeping Hound pinned beneath her body, grinding her cunt furiously on the brainwashed woman's face. She's going to cum, but it's going to be on her terms.

"You can do better than that," she snarls. "Bitch. Fuck me."

Hound responds exactly as she'd hoped: with submission. That's how Kotys knows she's won. Hound is her creature now. Her plaything, straining to eat her out deeper and better. Kotys has passed the test. The euphoria bubbling through her brain tells the whole story.

Which means there's no more reason to hold back.

Kotys lets herself cum all over Hound's face. She rides her to the very end, eager to milk every last drop of pleasure out of her victory. She's earned it, after all, just as she's earned the right to buck her hips and fill the room with her ragged screams of bliss.

Fuck. She's so alive.

This is real triumph. A medal on her chest wouldn't even come close. Neither would any other sex Kotys has ever had. None of it means the same. Handler spoke earlier of owning another human being's soul. Now, Kotys understands. She understands how awe-inspiring the feeling is. She understands that she needs it more, forever. The addiction is instantly. The craving is almost enough to make her want to ride Hound's face a second time.

But she didn't come here for just sex. So after Hound goes limp, Kotys extracts

herself and clambers wearily to her feet. She chooses to savor the moment and so, unhurried, she takes a long while to fix her clothes before she turns to address Handler. But when she does, the expression she sees is worse than any she might have dreaded.

Boredom. Crushing, total boredom.

“How very disappointing,” Hander sighs.

That chills Kotys all the way through. Maybe the drug isn’t quite out of her system yet, because she feels the reprimand as a stab. An icicle in her chest. What’s going on? It can’t go wrong. Not again.

“B-but I...” she splutters. Her power, her dominance, is a lost memory, snatched away in three words. “I...”

“You. Failed.” Handler says each word so very clearly.

“N-no,” Kotys pleads. “No, I-“

She trips backward and is sent sprawling again. Handler seems to loom above her. It’s obvious to anyone that She has already passed judgment, but Kotys is already far beyond dignity.

“I beat her!” Kotys whines. “I did! I made her-“

“You rolled around on the ground like a pair of stupid animals.” Handler delivers the verdict clinically. “Is that what you suppose I wanted to see, Sergeant Kotys?”

Like before, all Kotys can do is turn her uncontrollable shame into anger. “B-but

that's what you do!" she babbles. "You freaks. Down here. We're the same!"

That, at long last, earns something more than bored contempt. It earns a little anger, and even that little is terrifyingly worse. In a swift, disciplinarian movement, Handler steps forwards and grabs Kotys by her messed-up hair, and wrenches her head upwards so hard it makes her neck scream.

"Unlike you," Handler hisses at her, "I don't fuck dogs."

Again, she's a god. A star-being. Under her gaze, Kotys crumples. She knows in her heart that Handler is right. She's always right. She's right that they are not the same. Handler possesses a dominance beyond strength, and it is hers. Kotys was just a brat. She was indulging. And for her hubris, she deserves all of this punishment.

"I-I-I'll go," Kotys blubbers, fighting to stand. She wants to collapse and pass out, but she wants to be away from Handler even more. "I'm sorry. Sir. I'll go. B-back to my-"

"No." Handler smiles cruelly at her. "You won't. You're ruined for that now. I've already arranged your transfer, Sergeant Kotys. We have uses for mutts, down here."

She clicks her tongue again, and Hound is upon Kotys. This time, Hound isn't play fighting. She's as strong as a demon and there is no resisting her - not that it matters. Kotys has no resistance left. A glorious destiny will never be hers. She was a pilot - an average pilot, yes, but still a pilot - and now she's nothing. She threw it away. There's nothing left to fight for. It's done. She doesn't know what happens to mutts, but whatever it is, she'll accept it.

After all, Handler knows best for all her dogs.

The broken pilot sobs as Hound begins to drag her deeper into the Kennels.

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