

PLAYING ^{FOR} KEEPS

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My last challenger
didn't even make it
to round two...

what makes
YOU think
you can
handle me?



The crowd burst into applause when Athena entered the ring. There, under the blinding spotlights, screamed at by dozens of well-to-do but unsavory types, she reminded Jace of her namesake. Her figure towered over him, svelte and athletic. She exuded an animal magnetism, a tangible aura of menace and sensuality – and for all his training, Jace could not stop his eyes from wandering. Her skin glistened under the lights, slick with moisture. This glow framed her every curve. Long arms covered with winding tattoos led on to broad shoulders, which she rolled and loosened. Her leg muscles tensed as she hopped in place, each hop making the ring under Jace tremble under her weight. The audience whistled. They liked what they saw. Were Jace not so terrified, he would have agreed. Athena's body called out to him. Her round breasts bounced, moving with such a heft that he felt as if they could crush him if given a chance; her hips swayed slightly with each movement in a purposeful strut, giving her ass just enough of a bounce to provoke.

Jace lost himself in her form. The constraining pressure in his shorts grew uncomfortable. He wanted to find the secrets hidden under her flesh, to reach and touch that scalding skin, to feel his hand slide over the slick surface, led into the valleys of her body. Between her breasts, so that he may feel their softness surround him. Down to her thighs, those thick thighs with their tense muscles pushing outward against a thin layer of pudgy and taut skin. Between. Where he could press his fingers to her –

“Like my tattoos?”

Her voice came mocking, but softer than he'd expected. More alluring. Back in the real world, with haze in his mind and a raging hard-on between his legs, Jace looked up at her. His dry lips stuck together; unable to gather words, he could only nod.

“They're tally marks.” Athena gave her hand wraps a tug, adjusting them slightly. She tilted her head to the side, and her thick black hair, caught up in a neat ponytail, brushed against her shoulder. “I get a new one for every challenger I digest in the ring.”

Jace winced. He looked at her again, like a challenger this time. He looked past the exuding sexuality, past the oil and sweat and glistening between the thighs, and at the fighting machine that stood before him, underneath it all. She had plump flesh to cushion his blows, and the muscle to counter them.

“You're bluffing.”

She took a step forward, a single step – and her voluptuous body stood within arm's reach. “You're right,” she whispered. “What's your name?”

“The Mysterious Stranger.”

“Your real name.”

“Jace.”

“Mine's Mary Rose. I'm a novelist. If I claim a challenger every week, I make enough money to write the other six days. I'll name a character after you, Jace. That's how I honor my victims.”

She raised her fist. The suddenness of it startled Jace, who recoiled away from her. But she didn't strike – she just looked past him, at the rows of seats full of mob bosses, crooked politicians, investment bankers, and overworked office drones, and she raised her voice into a roar. “This is what you bring me?! You call this a sacrifice worthy of my attention? This Mysterious Stranger may have done well so far, but to the great Athena, he is barely worth the effort of digesting!”

She paused for drama, soaked in the clapping, the drunken whistles, the screams for blood.

“But you paid for a show, and Athena will give you one! My bowels are going to snap him in two. My guts are going to grind him to mush. He came here looking for

glory, but all he will find is my churning insides – and he will pad out my curves and decorate my body, like all who came before him!”

“Nothing personal, of course,” she added under her breath, as the crowd roared.

“Nice speech,” Jace blurted out. His pale face, sunken eyes, and stiff limbs betrayed his true feelings.

“Thanks. I draw from the Phallic woman archetype.”

Both contestants took their corners. Jace fought to regain control of his own body. Athena simply stared, her confident smile belying something else. Jace knew then that he, like all others, had her sympathy – her sympathy just wasn’t worth much.

The crowd calmed down; money stopped exchanging hands. Jace knew he was the underdog. He knew the bets were not on whether he’d win, but on how long he’d last.

The bell rang twice. The lights dimmed.

“Alright,” Jace mumbled to himself, raising his fists. “Time to make Kim proud.”

“Good! Again!”

Jace tried to pull back. Too late. His body was already in motion. Kim’s hand pressed to his forearm, redirecting his blow. His bandaged fist brushed against her inner thigh, and she lowered her body, bending backward slightly. Before him, Kim’s fit body arched; gleaming breasts perked up, raising and dropping to the cadence of her labored breaths.

Her labia parted at just the right moment. Jace’s knuckles slid against the slippery flesh, guided into its warm embrace by his own momentum. *Squelch*. His arm disappeared. Around it, he felt her walls compressing, locking into place. Their writhing surface massaged her juices into his skin. He knew what to do. He placed his free hand on her pelvis, watched it sink into the soft skin. One inch, two – and then he felt muscle. Jace pushed with all his strength.

Kim bit her lip. A line of dribble flowed from the corner of her half-open mouth, circled her neck, and dripped down from between her shoulders. “C’mon, Jace, you can do it!”

Jace’s face reddened. His free arm shook, and muscles bulged against his skin. Even as he pushed, his other arm slid deeper into Kim’s pussy, deeper into that welcoming warmth of hers. He closed his mind to its allure. The scent of her honey washed over him, seeping into his nostrils and clouding his mind. She made him want it. She was full of tricks.

The soft folds stretched ever wider, hungry for him. He flexed to slow down their advance, but a bend of the hip forced his arm to straighten. Already the bulk of his arm was lost inside Kim, weighed down by her pulsing flesh, unable to find purchase in her slippery inner walls and relaxing into the plentiful juices that she massaged into his skin. Already his fingers, now outstretched, felt the plump ring that was her cervix; a ring that rolled over his fingertips, clamping like a vise. It cut some slack only when Jace’s efforts faltered; when they did, Kim’s pussy clenched, the suction increased, and his face was pulled closer and closer to those thin lips of hers.



The struggle lasted only a moment. Jace could not match a predator's strength; his attempts were doomed from the start. Once Kim got a grip, it was over, and both knew that.

The final pull came quickly, and Jace braced for the familiar feeling of being sucked into his coach's womb. The walls closed in around his head, first, squeezing their pulsing flesh against his face and hair. His hair soaked in her juices and stuck to his scalp, and his eyelids grew heavy with the weight of her honey. It pooled around his lips, seeping through just slightly, giving his saliva a salty-sweet tang. Kim's walls compressed him from all sides. They crashed over him like massive waves, softening his skin and relaxing his muscles. And soon enough, he was in that dark, moist place, curled up, lost in her embrace and listening to her body's lullaby.

Jace smiled. He had her on the ropes. He could tell from the wheezing of her lungs and from the buzzing of her heart. He could tell from how her insides smoldered around him, heated by exertion and desire. He could tell from the spaciousness of her womb, which started out their practice tight and confining and only loosened as Kim herself did. He could tell from the way his weight inside her caused her to falter.

Kim put a hand over her engorged belly. Jace felt it inside. He knew what it meant, so he braced for it.

Her cervix gaped, her womb squeezed. Her body forced its will over his once more. He slid through the slick walls, taking one final breath of her intoxicating scent, enjoying the last caress of her walls against his skin.

Kim sat in a pool of her own sweat and juices and spread her legs. Goosebumps covered her skin. Her outstretched belly flexed. Her labia parted, and from the glistening pink flesh, Jace's feet emerged. Then his shorts, soaked and clinging to his skin, and then his shirt, darkened by her juices. When his head popped out, Jace gasped for air, and for a moment, looked down at his arms, his wrists still inside his coach's

pussy, his fingers still warm and sticky. Begrudgingly, he pulled them out with a pop and watched the final few drops of her honey flow freely out of her slowly closing labia.

The cold stung his wet skin. He rose to his shaky feet, dripping all over, and his limbs slumped. He caught the towel Kim tossed his way, and with it, dried himself of her musk.

“C’mon, Jace. You were doing so well until the very end.”

Jace raised an eyebrow. Kim was slipping her underwear back on. The black lace panties fit neatly over her dark skin; when the fabric touched her sensitive folds, they sucked it in slightly, until the thin black strip was all but gone.

“Until the very end?”

“Don’t play dumb, Jace. You know that once a predator gets a grip, it’s over. You used up precious stamina trying to fight it.” As she spoke, Kim slid on her tank top. It hung loose over her fit form. “If this was the real thing, you wouldn’t make it through the next round.”

“Well, it wasn’t the real thing. Besides, maybe I like it in there. Maybe I was just pretending to fight it for the fun of it.”

“Maybe you’d like a punch in the teeth,” Kim winked. “After all, both will lose you matches.”

He brought his bottle to his mouth while Kim procured her towel. The lull in the conversation made them more aware of each other. Jace looked at his coach. Sometimes, when he lost too many matches, he saw Kim’s mask beginning to crack. First, her breath would pick up. Then she’d get that lustful glimmer in her eye. Then her body would become languid, burning up from the pleasure of sucking someone in so often.

She had told Jace once, at the bar, over a round of celebratory shots, something he never forgot. He could see her even now, red as a tomato, grumbling half-coherently and gesticulating all over the place. ‘I hope you appreciate what I do for you, Jace,’ she had told him in a moment of clarity between two glasses. ‘We predators aren’t wired for that. For us, snatching up someone like that and not keeping or digesting them is like sex without orgasm. It leaves us hollow inside.’ Then they had gone and spent their first and only night together. Jace remembered waking up in the morning with a massive hangover, his lower body trapped in her ass, and a stinging sensation on the tips of his toes. They never tried to hook up again after that.

But the revelation stuck with him. Now, whenever he found himself pulled into her womb, or into her bowels – he looked for signs of her pleasure. And, indeed, the Kim who stood before him right now, was at the cusp of orgasm.

“Anyway, that aside, you did great today. Your reflexes have improved a lot, and your right hook is as killer as ever. You could make it in the big time.”

“Big time, now that’s a funny joke.” Jace sighed. “Look, Kim, can I ask you a huge favor?”

Kim stopped her stretching to look over her shoulder. As soon as she saw his grim expression, she knew what it was about. She walked up to him and put a hand on his shoulder – he winced away from her, half-expecting a sucker punch disguised as some kind of lesson, but she just smiled.

“Don’t ask. I’ve done enough damage to your pride tonight, with the whole shoving you up my pussy thing,” Kim said. “Today’s session is on me, and I won’t hear any more about it. Spend that money on keeping yourself fed, so that when you do land a match, you’ll be at peak performance.”

“I don’t deserve you, Kim.”

“You sure don’t. Now fuck off, you look disgusting.”

She considered slapping Jace's ass as he ran off, but by the time she stopped hesitating, he was long gone.

The barking jolted Jace awake from his nap. He sat up in a huff and immediately regretted it as every single muscle in his body decided to scream in pain. He lingered on his seat for a few seconds, pinching the bridge of his nose; then, begrudgingly, he looked to his dog.

"Walk time already, Buster?"

Buster was at the door, alternating between barking and looking at his owner. The rescue rat terrier may have been showing his age in the sagging of his eyes and graying of the fur around his snout, but he never allowed Jace to forget about walk time.

Jace checked his phone. Three in the morning. He had been sleeping since five – and Buster, sensing his exhaustion, had let him be.

"What is it, boy? Think the neighbor's cat is out and about again?"

He smacked his lips; his mouth tasted bitter. After a long stretch, he switched the light on and the television off. His home's state of disarray got a groan out of him. How could a studio apartment get this messy?

Once his hand rested on the door, Buster sat, looking up at him expectantly. He glanced around at something he could use as a weapon. His can of Mace hung from his keychain. Yes, that would do. With it in hand, he peeked out of the door.

The hallway was empty, save for an envelope on his welcome mat. Before Buster could help himself to it, Jace picked it up. No address or return address. No name. Just an envelope, and inside, on a folded piece of printing paper, a short message.

We have seen your performance, and we are pleased.

We would like you to participate in our Main Event – match with our champion under Basque Rules. Victory will be handsomely rewarded.

Call this number if interested.

"Basque Rules," he repeated. "What in the world?"

He glanced at the number. Buster looked up at him, tail wagging. Jace patted the dog's head – and, just to make sure, checked on the spare key. Still under the welcome mat. Good.

"Man," he mumbled as he closed the door. "I've got to tell Kim about this."

Kim never looked as beautiful as she did that morning, sitting at the promenade, stirring her coffee with one hand, flicking through a book with the other. Funny thing with Kim, Jace thought as he pulled up a chair – at this point, he was so used to seeing her in the nude, that a few layers of clothing made her much more alluring. They added mystery to a landscape he was intimately familiar with. The glasses, as much as he mocked them, gave her a mature and intellectual look. The crop top accentuated her plump breasts, while the ripped jeans and sandals added a casual touch to the ensemble.

"Ouch," she said when she looked over her lenses and up at him. "Stayed up all night watching Netflix again, have you?"

Jace rubbed the bags under his eyes. "That bad, huh?"

"Yup."

He pulled out his wallet. The message from the night before was folded into a neat little square. Kim looked at it curiously, then back at Jace. At his behest, she unfolded it.

Jace saw her smile fade as she read it, mouthing the words. She stopped before reaching the end. "Jace," she said. Her voice was low and grave. "Do you know what 'Basque Rules' are?"

He opened his mouth to answer, but she raised a hand to stop him. "You don't," she said, "because there's no such thing. 'Basque Rules' are code, Jace. Code for underground fighting. No rules." She leaned over the table, nearly spilling her coffee. "Playing for keeps."

Jace shivered at her words. Playing for keeps. Three words that had been pursuing him since he started boxing, back in middle school. Playing for keeps meant the winner takes all. It meant that if a predator won, the loser didn't get to come home.

"No way that's right. Are you sure?"

She bit her lip and looked away, and at that moment, Jace knew.

"No way."

Kim looked around. The esplanade was bustling. Too bustling for anyone to be listening.

"Only for a few years, to make ends meet. It was that or slumming it."

"Did you ever..."

"Jace..."

"Oh my God."

Silence fell between the two. Jace fiddled with his phone. Kim finished her coffee and flicked idly through the pages of her book. The atmosphere weighed heavy, unbroken even by the hubbub that surrounded them. It was Kim who broke the silence.

"I'm not proud of it, Jace. Everyone who walked into that ring knew the stakes, but it was still senseless. That's why I'm telling you, asking you, hell, I'm begging you – burn that letter and never look back. You don't want to end up like the people I went up against."

She handed him the piece of paper back. He looked at it for a second, then back at her. He hesitated. The letter promised a handsome reward. Would it be a thousand dollars? Two? Ten? A hundred thousand? How many months of rent, rice and beans, and dog food could he cover with it? All for one night – and a victory, of course.

"What was it like? Playing for keeps?"

"Terrifying. Exhilarating. Tragic. You're out there, there's hundreds of eyes on you. You're naked, exposed for all to see, all oiled up. They bring out some poor sod and bill them as the young upstart, or the underdog. It really is like any other predator-prey boxing match. We're still not allowed to move offensively. But once we get a grip – there's no coming back out. No release and handshake. It has to end in digestion."

Jace chewed on his lip. He rolled the words in his mouth, unsure of whether to say them. When they did come out, they were whispered. "You told me once that's what predators are wired for. That catch and release frustrates you."

"Sex without orgasm."

"That's what you called it."

"Yeah," Kim said, "but there's more important things in life than an orgasm."

Jace forgot all about the letter and the tempting offer it contained. He crumpled it up, slid it into his pocket, and moved on with his life. The concept of ‘playing for keeps’ went back to being a mythical boogeyman that Jace would never encounter.

Late spring transitioned to warm summer. Jackets and jeans gave way to shirts and shorts. And every day, at the break of dawn, Jace and stepped into Kim’s gym.

Today was no different. Everything was as he knew it – the trophies still gathering dust on the shelves, the ring with its bleached colors and sagging ropes, the folding table in the corner, the coffee machine, the plastic cups. Even the faint smell of mold felt like home.

Kim sat at the table, staring out into the distance. She didn’t seem to notice him. She didn’t seem to notice much of anything.

“Hey, Kim.”

She blinked; for a moment, she looked like a deer in headlights. Her brain rushed to catch up. “Morning, Jace. Ready?”

“You know it. What do you have planned for today?”

“Planned?” she asked, looking down at the table as if she expected the answers to lie there. “Right. We’ll work on your footwork today. It’s been a while.”

Jace sighed. He leaned over the table, smiling at her. “Kim,” he said, his voice low and full of concern. “We did footwork yesterday. Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she mumbled. “Yeah,” she repeated, this time with intent; she got up, downed her coffee, and patted Jace’s back. “Let’s just spar a little. I want to see how you fare against me in a straight match.”

Jace whistled. “Is this the final exam? If I win, does that mean you have nothing else to teach me?”

He braced for the inevitable retort and tried to predict it. He wondered what kind of verbal lashing he had set himself up for with his sly comment. Probably something about him being unteachable. Yes, she’d probably go for that low blow – she knew Jace took those personally. Kim loved to strike nerves. Said it kept him sharp.

But Kim just smiled grimly. “Something like that, yeah.”

Her words hit Jace harder than any punch.

After a basic warmup, they stepped into the ring, and the old plywood creaked under their feet. Jace got ready. Kim got naked.

Then he threw the first punch.

Two bodies danced in circles for minutes on end. Jace let loose; he knew Kim could take it. She always let him feel like he was winning. She would go on the defensive, struggling to parry and deflect his blows, lull him into a sense of security – and then, at the very end, unveil a trick and kick his ass. Kim trained him like that, by instilling in him pride in his abilities and following up with a lesson in humility. It made him bold but cautious. It made him well-rounded.

Today, no new trick came. No lesson to teach. Just skill, pure and simple, matched up against his. He read her body well, avoiding the obvious pitfalls, keeping his strikes quick and hard to predict – and punish.

“Time,” called Kim, after yet another attempt to guide his uppercut between her thighs failed. “That’s good. You did good.”

“You went easy on me,” he said with a tired smile.

“I didn’t want to crush you too hard on our last fight.”

Jace laughed. His laughter died down when he saw that she wasn’t smiling. He leaned back on the ropes, allowing them to carry the burden of a body pushed past its limits. “What?”

She gestured to the room around them. Jace followed her movements. His eyes trailed from her glistening figure to the dreary walls that surrounded them. The cracks on the concrete. The cobwebs on the exposed pipes. The absence of any other form of human life save for the two of them. For the first time, the reality of Kim's gym hit Jace. Stripped of all nostalgia, memories, and the camaraderie between coach and athlete, it was just an old shithole.

"The Health and Safety people came by yesterday," Kim said into her towel. "They said I've stretched their patience too thin already. They said I either renovate, or they shut me down for good."

Jace frowned. "That's a shame. I'll miss the current getup. Really gives it an atmosphere."

"Yeah."

He reached up to her and patted her shoulder. "But hey, I bet it'll look even better when it's all nice and fixed up, eh?"

"I can't renovate, Jace."

"What?"

"I can't afford it. The gym barely breaks even as is."

"So you're letting it die?"

"It was already on life support. All they did was pull the plug." She turned her back on him, stepped out of the ring, and leaned on the wall while she caught her breath. "I have two weeks. We can still get some serious training done in the meantime, and I know a guy I can refer you to. You won't go uncoached."

Jace crossed his arms and stared. Kim couldn't bear to look him in the eye; she lowered her head and sighed. "I know, I know. But even if we made it, I'd still be running the gym at a loss. You're a great customer, Jace, but you can't carry my entire business."

"There must be something you can do. Crowdfunding, bake sales, loans? I can scrounge up what I owe you. We can salvage this."

"It's just a gym, Jace. Let it go."

He could tell from the way she forced those words past the knot of her throat, that she was trying to convince herself, too.

"I'll find a way to make it right, Kim. I promise."

Kim smiled mirthlessly. "Invite me to your mansion when you make it big."

"Kim..."

They hugged. All the laughter that followed was feigned, all the jokes were lifeless, and all the teasing rang hollow. The training went on without a hitch, and when the time came to say goodbye, they parted without a word.

Jace saved as much as he could. He borrowed from family members, begged from friends. He offered to do odd jobs for a pittance and saved every penny. He fed Buster first, and himself second, sometimes not at all. He lagged on rent, cut back on hot water and electricity, and sold most of his possessions online. Every penny earned or saved went to the Kim fund; the fund he would surprise her with.

At home, he sat on the floor, emptying the pockets of clothes he no longer needed. He had found someone who would buy some used clothes. He tried to decide which ones he needed the least.

Then he found it, in one of his nicer jackets, a piece of crumpled up paper. Paying it no mind, he tossed it aside – but when Buster’s eyes perked up and he dragged himself across the room towards it, Jace reached out and snatched it away.

“For the last time, you old fart,” he said as he petted the dog’s bony side, “not everything that I throw on the floor is for you to eat.”

Buster yawned, shuffled closer, and rested his head over his lap. He peeked out from the corner of his eye, still following the paper in Jace’s hand.

Jace unfolded the paper. The very first line reawakened memories he thought lost. Fear – and a twisted sense of hope.

He reached into his pocket and took out his phone – that old brick he’d dug up from a drawer after selling his smartphone on the streets. He sent a text and made a call.

When Kim checked her phone that night, her heart sank. She tried to call Jace back. If only she could talk to him, yell at him, plead with him, she knew he’d straighten out. He always did. The first few attempts, he was busy; then he had switched the phone off. He didn’t answer her texts. She called his family. Checked his apartment. Nothing.

She sat by her window, staring at the skyline beyond. The downtown skyscrapers blocked out the sun. The roads filled with commuters and buses. From her dingy little apartment, she saw it all.

Kim mended burned bridges with bribes and promises. She spoke with voices she had hoped to never hear again. She pulled on contacts who had all but forgotten her name. She threatened, she begged, she promised money she didn’t have. In the end, she was given a time and an address. The address was downtown. The time was thirty minutes ago.

The crowd roared. Jace stepped back, wiping the sweat from his brow before it got into his eyes. Athena didn’t follow. She stood there, in front of him, mocking him with her silence. Her skin was red where his punches had connected – and she still smiled. The heavy flush that came over her gave her an allure, the same kind of allure Kim had. Athena’s was different, of course. Hers was a languid heat, one that slowed instead of inflaming. His fists slid off her oiled skin. Sometimes they sank into the supple fat, sending ripples through her form. Sometimes she moaned, and sometimes she winced, but in the end, she always smiled.

Jace wanted her. He wanted her, to take her and to be taken by her, to lose himself in the flames of his desire that all the eyes on him only managed to stoke further. He wanted to be one with her, to reach deep into her depths, to explore them, to endure their harshest punishment and most generous rewards. The smell of her sex hung heavy on the air. It was sharp, enticing. That rivulet running down her thigh wasn’t sweat; it was the fruit of her growing anticipation, the scent of her lust, the slick trap that ached to claim Jace.

Athena opened her arms. Her body had shifted. All semblance of control or dignity melted away with Jace’s first blow, leaving behind a creature of lust, panting

through gritted teeth, salivating at the mouth, pupils dilating, breasts heaving and pussy gaping.

She exhaled, and condensation formed around her face. Her whole body appeared to steam. All the scented oil and sweat and lubricant that soaked her took to the air and embraced Jace's form, caressing his nostrils and setting his thoughts aflame.

He took control of that lust. He channeled that sexual frustration into action. His heart beat fast, spreading adrenaline through his body, sharpening his mind to a single focus: Athena.

Athena was unprepared for such an assault. She withstood the first blow, blocked the second – tried to block the third as well, but was tricked by a feint. Jace exploited the opening with a swift jab to the stomach, and his knuckles sank into her skin. The pudge engulfed them, and they pushed through the cushion of fat, shoving it out of the way until they met muscle, until they struck bone.

For the first time, Athena's smile vanished.

The wind got knocked out of her lungs; her great weight thrown off by a single well-placed punch. She stumbled back, grasping at her stomach, the same stomach that claimed so many victims and withstood even the most violent of prey struggles. Jace allowed himself a moment's hope.

She fell upon the ropes. Her arms intertwined with them, and she avoided her match-ending fall, but only barely. Jace instinctively looked around for the referee, only to remember there was no referee. No referee and no rules – save for the one.

Jace covered the distance between himself and the champion with a few swift steps. He looked her in the eye, bringing back his right arm, winding his muscles like a trap – and then releasing them in a burst of motion aimed at Athena's jaw.

The smile returned. The slumped body before him tensed. Athena's hands grasped at the ropes, her feet pushed against the floor. As he moved in for the kill, she lifted her lower body off the ground and raised her left leg – and Jace watched in horror as his fist drew the line of her inner thigh, slathering it with her juices. The momentum carried him forward even as his muscles tried to pull back, but it was too late. His fist slapped wetly against her lips, which bloomed at his touch, releasing a gasp of her intoxicating aroma. They enveloped his fist in their warm caress, welcoming its natural advance, ushering it inwards, further, deeper. Her walls contracted against his skin, pulling at it with gentle suction. Her honey dribbled down his arm, tickling his sensitive skin.

Athena looked down at Jace and rested a hand over his unkempt hair. Her mouth hung open, but her brain couldn't keep up. Her character would have said something here, to give a sense of finality – but the actress could only think of how hot she burned for Jace.

She pushed his head down, towards her cunt, where it joined his arm. Jace gasped for his last breath of air before the suction pulled him in. Remembering his lesson, he didn't resist; instead, he relaxed his body and let it happen.

The crowd's roars and whistles fell silent when Athena engulfed Jace's ears. He was alone with her, in her.

He noted the small ways her body differed from Kim's. Kim was controlled. Everything about her was order and precise rhythm – clockwork. Athena was raw sensation. Her body sang a song of throbbing and squelching. Kim pulled and coaxed; Athena slurped.

He fought his body's instinct to be at ease. The effort took a lot out of him, even though Athena gave him precious little time to enjoy the ride. Jace found his mind wandering to Kim again. Kim was always so gentle with him, she stretched out the

moment, she made it last. She knew he enjoyed it. Only now, after all this time, with half of his body stuck inside a vagina, did Jace realize that not everyone made it a pleasurable ride. All those hundreds of times Kim had taken him in, welcomed him into the deepest recesses of her body, massaged his tired form with the contractions of her walls, soaked him in her warm juices – those were little gestures of affection. Kim was generous.

Athena wasn't. She coveted him. Jace's trip up her cunt ended almost as soon as it started, with her cervix clenching around his head with a crushing grip and exerting its suction on him. That one final slurp sent him tumbling into her womb to be compressed by her walls, and they were forceful, persistent things that offered him no respite. They crushed and ground and churned; they battered and twisted. Out there in the ring, Athena could only block and dodge. In her womb, however, he was hers to do as she pleased.

His bruised body went limp. The assault came from all directions. He could only take it and pray, but how long would he last? The air was thin and humid, weighing in his lungs, and his sweaty body stewed, close to overheating. He couldn't even struggle. Her grip was too tight and her assault, too senseless.

Just as he gave up, a forceful contraction shook him. A second one pushed him. A third one released him into the open air, and there he fell, mushy and sore. Athena towered over him, flushed and crazed, not even pretending anymore. One hand pinched at her nipple, rolled the hard nub between her fingers, and she drank in the waves of pleasure it shot through her nervous system; the other slid between her legs and spread her labia, mocking Jace with a sight of the gaping hole he had just emerged from. Contracting and expanding, glistening under the spotlights, with juices pouring out in long sticky strings.

"I'll try to make it quick," she panted, words slipping through gritted teeth and a smile. "I wish I could make it painless."

Jace didn't grace her with a response. When she squatted over him, he tried to crawl away, to find his footing. No such luck. His body was spent. He had no fight left in him.

Athena lowered herself onto him. Her ass pressed down on his thighs, squeezing them under its weight. It rolled down his legs, made slick by her juices until it hung over his boxing boots. She thrust her hips, trapping the tip of his toes between her buttocks.

Jace started sliding in.

Kim was surprised at how little the club had changed over the years. Still the same seedy bar at ground level. Still the same cramped set of stairs leading to a soundproofed basement. The bouncers stopped her, looked at her, and let her in. One of them smirked.

The crowd's roars deafened her. She pushed her way through, grunting, trying not to inhale too much of the stench of perspiration, alcohol, and cheap perfume that washed over the room. Each row she broke through revealed more glimpses of the ring.

She elbowed one last audience member and saw it at last.

"Jace, you fucking idiot."

A female fighter stood in the middle of the ring, fists in the air, basking in the applause. Sweat ran down her glistening form. Veins pulsed under her skin, and her entire body rumbled. Her legs stood slightly apart, the gap between them obscured by her sagging stomach; Kim caught but a glimpse of a familiar face, before it disappeared into Athena's ass.

"Jace!"

Kim's scream faded into the uproar. She stepped forward and grabbed on to the barrier, ready to vault it when a cold hand took hold of her forearm. She looked back. *Everett*. His smile was even more rotten than the first time they'd met.

"Easy there, big girl. No greeting old friends?"

"Get me down there. Now."

"Testy, aren't we? I haven't forgotten what you did me last time you were here, Goldstreak. Had to pull on a lot of strings to make the heat die down."

"Get me down there, *Everett*. Please."

He raised an eyebrow. He took a puff of his cigarette, adding yet another ash stain to his once white tuxedo; from behind his thick glasses, he glanced at the ring. "Couldn't keep away, could you, Goldstreak? Want a shot at our champion? Oh, that'd be one hell of a show."

Kim was shaking. Every second passed brought Jace closer to an early grave. *Everett* could see how upset she was, and it pleased him. His movements lingered, even his breaths slowed. The cigarette burned between his fingers. He gave it one last pull, then flicked the still smoldering butt into the crowd. "Don't fuck with me, Goldstreak."

With that final warning, he retreated into the announcer booth.

Kim caught but a glimpse of a familiar face, before it disappeared into Athena's ass.

Jace,
you fucking
idiot.



“Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please. We have a new challenger!”

Kim marched into the ring. She tossed her glasses aside. Her crop top. She slid out of her jeans and kicked them into a corner, same as her shoes.

“Some of you will remember our very own legend of the ring, Goldstreak! Welcome her back after her five years’ retirement!”

She entered the cage, where Athena stared blankly at her approach.

Athena grasped her stomach, feeling the contractions within. Jace’s body no longer moved; only his raspy breaths and the weak beating of his heart let her know there was life still in him. His weight shifted inside her, winding through her intestines, sliding through the endless rubbery corridors towards its final destination. Seeing Kim approach, she clenched. Her insides went into overdrive. Her guts released her prey into her stomach, and as that happened, a deep relief washed over her.

“It looks like Athena has claimed the Mysterious Stranger, but digestion will have to wait! Goldstreak wants to steal the challenger for herself. There’s only one way this can end!”

Kim did her best to ignore the voice that blasted out of every loudspeaker. She had no time for it, or for the adulation of the crowd. Before her stood Athena, in a state of shock.

“Goldstreak...”

“Release him.”

Her words cut. Athena recoiled, shielding her stomach defensively. “I claimed him, fair and square. If I release him now, they’ll turn on me.” She bit her lip, looking up at the crowd. Moments ago, they cheered for her victory, but no more prayers came this Athena’s way. The masses sang but one name now – *Goldstreak. Goldstreak.*

“Goldstreak,” Athena repeated.

“Let. Him. Go.”

“I’ve heard all about you, Goldstreak. You’re a hero around these parts.”

“There are no heroes around these parts.”

“But there are. Goldstreak always played fair. She always won. She always put on a show. And in the end, like any hero, she left on her own terms in the middle of a match, leaving the club in disarray. They call me the next Goldstreak, you know. It’s their highest praise.”

Kim sneered. While Athena spoke, she sized up her opponent. But no matter how much she tried to appraise her body language, muscle mass, state – her eyes always wandered to her pudgy stomach, swollen and stretched, the surface ripping and rumbling. She could only think of Jace.

“I don’t want to face you, Goldstreak, I really don’t. But they”– she gestured towards the bleachers –“would never forgive me if I walked away. So I guess we’re doing this, but before we get started, tell me – why did you do it?”

“What?”

“Why did you run?”

Kim bit her lip. She looked not in Athena’s eyes, but to her belly. She spoke slowly, clearly, enunciating every word so it could make it through even the tightest flesh and plumpest fat.

“I got tired of killing. It wore down on me. A different face every week, a different tragedy that made them gamble their lives away for some money. Hospital bills. Rent. Drug addictions. And I snuffed them out for people’s amusement.”

She sighed. “One day, he came in. He was young and full of potential. He shook my hand before the match. We fought. He was good, but I was better. I claimed him, and the crowd chanted for me to end it, and I did. I always did. But when I felt the last

struggle before he gave up, I came. It was the best feeling I ever had. It inundated me from head to toe. And then... it was over. He went quiet. My mind was clear. And I realized I had just orgasmed to someone accepting their death.”

“And so I ran. I ran with him inside me, naked, and I ran into the streets. They tried to chase me. They needed their legend. It took me too long to lose them. I locked myself in a public restroom and tried to get him out, but it was too late. He was already gone. I thought to turn myself in, or to end it all. Then you showed up, Jace, and you had that look in your eye, and that untapped potential, and that optimism. I snipped so many careers in the bud – I thought I could make at least one blossom.”

She caught herself before the tears could come. She made herself strong and steely-eyed. She turned to Athena, who shifted nervously, stirred by the crowd’s impatience.

“If you won’t release him, then you give me no choice. I’ll tear you apart and pull him out of you if I have to.”

“What’s your name?”

“Kim.”

“Mary Rose. It was nice knowing you, Kim.”

As soon as the bell rang, Athena knew she was outmatched. Perhaps at her peak, she would have been able to keep up with Kim, to give her at least a semblance of a fight. But Athena was tired. Jace had taken a lot out of her while he lasted – and now that he curled up in her stomach, he still got in the way. His weight slowed her down; the effort of digestion, too, drained all her strength, filling her muscles with a comfortable languidness. Besides, Kim fought with a predator’s vigor. While Athena hesitated to fight her idol, Kim struck hard – and everything except Athena’s belly was fair game.

At that moment, Athena saw herself as she was: a career killer, a glorified whore, a piece of meat to lust after. Her training covered overpowering prey; it covered pulling them in and grinding them inside, it covered how to digest them most effectively, how to coax her own body to quake harder and gurgle louder. But against an actual combatant, a predator like herself, she was outmatched in every possible way.

For the second time that night, Athena fell upon the ropes. For the second time that night, she played possum with her opponent. Outmatched, perhaps, but not outfoxed.

Kim moved in, much like Jace had. They fought similarly, Athena thought. Kim went for the hook too. Athena was ready for it. She threw her legs up, hooked one around Kim’s leg, and guided her fist into her squishy depths.

The knuckles hit her cervix, and her juices splattered on the floor. Athena moaned, her cheeks burning bright red.

Kim pulled away. Not a budge. Stuck. *Damn*. Her nostrils flared. She glared up at Athena, at that apologetic look that she masqueraded as smugness.

“Nice trick,” Kim whispered.

Athena struggled to reply.

“Too bad it’s one of mine.”

She opened her hand. The wave of pleasure that washed over her opponent offered Kim an opening, and she took it – sliding her other fist between Athena’s buttocks and pushing until she found the asshole, and then punching with all her strength, widening the tight ring and burying her arm into the very same intestines that had claimed Jace. Athena gasped. Her stomach gurgled. Her pussy dripped, and so did her tongue. Kim pushed deeper – with both hands.

Her hand caressed the ribbed walls of Athena's pussy; she slid it over the slick surface and felt it pulse and throb against her skin. The warmth was soft, inviting, sweet-smelling. Each movement made her body squeak and tremble with pleasure. Her other hand, meanwhile, explored Athena's ass. It felt dryer against her skin, and the walls were harder, coarser, less pliable. It pulled on her arm, squeezing it tight, like a blood pressure cuff.

Athena could no longer hold back. No matter how hard she pulled, Kim wouldn't move, now that both her ass and pussy competed for the spoils. Meanwhile, the deep caresses drove her mad with pleasure; Kim's arms touched each other inside her, massaging the membrane that separated them with their rhythmic motions. Athena tried to hold on. She couldn't release only one of Kim's arms. The muscles that ran each hole were too closely connected. If he loosened up one, her whole grip on Kim would be released.

She held on until it didn't matter anymore. Kim's assault on the senses grew even bolder. Athena's breasts bounced, her pudge jiggled with each thrust. Her mouth hung open, and the little moans escaping it matched Kim's movements perfectly. Kim knew she was close. She could feel the walls contract around her. Closing and opening. Suckling at her skin.

The release came hard, with a forceful clenching of her innards, a massive twitch, and a scream. Athena's cunt opened wide, and her asshole gaped as well; taking the opportunity, Kim pulled out. The lips gripped stubbornly onto her knuckles, but it was too late. She was free.

Kim offered the wracked body before her one final look. Such a promising boxer, reduced to such a state. A mass of bouncing, dripping fat and muscle, lust bleeding from every pore, panting, pulsating.

She raised a fist, and her shout echoed through the basement, between chants of her *nom de guerre*.

"You wanted a show?! Here's your fucking show!"

Kim turned her back on the defeated. She stared down the crowd, fists in the air, her two middle fingers out. Backing up towards Athena, she felt the sweltering flesh rub against her back – and then bent over, catching her head between her buttocks, and clamping down.

No games. No hesitation. Just a flex and a pull, and a body disappearing into an ass. Simple stuff. Workmanlike. Kim's body stretched to accommodate Athena's – head first, then shoulders. The large breasts gave Kim no pause and slid in just as quickly as the rest of her. Even the bloated belly, in all its heft, sank into her ass. Once inside, Kim compressed her, pushed her, squeezed her. The trip through the winding caverns of her intestines took only a few seconds, and at the end of it, Kim was bloated, with a full stomach that bounced with every movement, weighing down on her womb, fueling her arousal.

Once the sense of triumph faded away, the terror set in. She reminded herself that there was a world beyond the ring and that she had eyes on her. Hundreds of them.

She moved with difficulty. Each step coaxed a moan out of her lips. Her insides rumbled, eager to get to work. She could not stop the natural course of things. She had to get out. Get out, get Athena out, and get to Jace.

Everett and four of his men stepped into the ring. Kim saw from their faces that they weren't here to congratulate her. They looked at her with an only passing interest, finding nothing alluring about her bare curves and bouncing gut. She tried to push her way through. They stopped her.

“I told you to not fuck with me, Goldstreak. We play for keeps here, and it’s about time you learned what that really means.”

He snapped his fingers. Eight powerful hands took hold of Kim by the throat, by the arms, by the legs. They slammed her into the floor, while the audience gasped and screamed, and that name echoed still. *Goldstreak. Goldstreak. Goldstreak.*

“Let me go, Everett! I need to go! I need to —”

“You need to relax,” Everett said. With a flick of the wrist, his men pinned Kim to the ground. Each of them took an arm or a leg, stopping her from moving. “Relax, sit back, and enjoy your meal. You earned it, anyway.”

Kim bit her lip. She relaxed her insides, preparing for a release. Her intestines stretched, her stomach contracted.

“Looks like you’re having trouble holding your meal in. Let me help.”

Everett pressed his foot on the base of her stomach, and pushed down hard, crushing her intestines under his weight. One of his men grabbed her by the throat and held it tight. Kim winced. Her eyes watered. She couldn’t release them. They were trapped in her, trapped in her stomach. Already she felt the acid bubble inside of her. They hissed as they washed over Athena’s skin and soaked her hair. They softened her up. Kim could feel her stomach growing mushier with each second passed.

Everett brought the microphone to his mouth. “*Look at this, ladies and gentlemen, what a show! You can’t get this anywhere else. A returning champion, coming to dethrone a goddess – and digesting not one, but two contenders at once!*”

Kim screamed into her gag. She struggled. She tried to take control of her digestion, to find a muscle to pull on or relax to end her stomach’s churning. Nothing worked. All eyes on her. The blinding spotlight. The sticky ring. The smell of sex. The men over her, grabbing her, handling her. Everett, pushing against her prey with his foot, keeping them where they belonged.

Her breath quickened. It became shallow. Her skin burned. The heat of digestion spread through her body, leaving her soft and pliable. Her breasts bounced. Her pussy throbbed under the stimulation from within. She felt the contours of a body against her insides. She felt them growing mushier with each pass of her acids. And when the pain and the pleasure and the grief and the infatuation were too much to withstand, when there was nothing but the crowd and the hands and the rumblings inside, she convulsed – and as her juices poured freely on the ring, so did her body finally surrender itself to sweet, terrible, unconsciousness.

“*Ladies and gentlemen, Goldstreak!*”

Kim woke up backstage on a couch – naked and with a heavy envelope in her hand.

With her head throbbing, she reached for the clothes, which had been neatly arranged on the coffee table. The glasses fit her poorly, her top left her belly exposed., the jeans confined her.

She alerted no one. There was no one to alert.

She got in a taxi and left without a word. The rising sun hurt her eyes; her insides ached. She paid her fare in silence. She tried the front door – it was still broken – and stepped into the musty hallways, dragging her feet.

Kim reached his door, knocked, and waited. Then she remembered, and she sank to her knees and cried.

Buster scratched at the door until his whines were too much for Kim to take. She stood on wobbly legs, picked up the spare key from under the welcome mat, and unlocked the door.

“Hey, Buster.”

Words scratched her throat.

The dog waddled closer, sniffed at her – then lowered himself to the ground, ears flat against his skull, whining.

“Come on, boy,” she whispered. “Let’s take you to your new home.”

Kim looked over her new gym, with all its warm colors and sleek, round-edged furniture. She paced between the rows of top-of-the-line workout machines and peeked into the training room where two of her students were already warming up. She whistled at them and gave them a thumbs-up, but ignored them otherwise. She couldn’t bring herself to smile. This new world of hers had no color, and no amount of sleek curves could change that.

Kim had never realized how much she needed his laughter echoing off the walls. His puzzled expression whenever she got to him. That eagerness to move forward, to take chances, to see what the world had to offer. He made her feel like the past didn’t matter. And now his shadow hung over him, haunting her. The little pleasures that used to brighten her day only reminded her of him. Sometimes, when she closed her eyes, she still felt him inside, slowly melting away. Sometimes, when someone smiled just right, she saw glimpses of his face. Every morning she hoped he would be in the gym, waiting for her.

Kim sighed.

On the folding table in the corner of the training room – the one with the dingy mismatched chairs, and the broken coffee machine – she re-lit the candle.

In the crowded room, Kim sat by herself.

Athena

9'0"

Sorry!
Nothing personal



Kim

8'8"

Now
Fuck off ~



Jace

5'7"

I don't
deserve you
Kim

