I

A SNARL, A SNEER, A WHIP THAT STINGS, THESE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS.

Welcome to Oblaque’s bleak oblique Blake—and Avon—section. (And try saying that one bit aloud three times in succession.) The stories that follow are somewhat pessimistic in tone and resolution, consistent, I believe, with the Blakian universe’s soap opera structure and overall despairing outlook. If you are not of a mind to agree, then please skip forward to the next part. But I warn you—you’ll be missing some very interesting speculations and some wonderfully dark, brooding writing.

THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE
M. Fae Glasgow

It is very difficult indeed for a large man to skulk, but Blake was doing his level best, sneaking into Avon’s room, trying to find Orac’s key. Careful to replace everything precisely where he found it, he tiptoed around, looking in drawers and under tapes, between computer parts and amongst clothes. He was going through the trouser pockets of Avon’s red leather suit when he heard the door open. //Oh, bloody hell,// he thought and dived into the wardrobe to hide, frantically trying to still the clacking of coathangers and the creaking of Avon’s multidudinous leather outfits. All sound died away, leaving him uncomfortably aware of silver studs pressed into his left cheek and the stuffy, redolent air in the closet. Avon’s footsteps sounded strange, muffled as they were by the wardrobe door. Blake heard him move around the room, dropping his boots on the floor, and doing other, obscure things that Blake couldn’t quite identify. Blake prayed fervently to any and all deities that Avon wasn’t going to bed, that he wouldn’t strip and hang his clothes up. Or at least, that he would be atypically untidy and leave Blake safe in his hiding place.

He heard the creak of the bed and assumed Avon had climbed onto it. The big rebel heaved a sigh of relief—he might just get out of this in one piece.

After a while, Blake inched the door open, enough to let in some light and air, enough for him to have a perfect view of the bed. Blake was somewhat taken aback, to put it mildly. The man lounging on the bed was Vila. He was glancing through a booktape, sipping from a tall glass of soma and adrenalin. Before Blake could recover from his astonishment, Vila looked up as the corridor door opened.

“You’re late…,” Vila snapped at Avon. “Where the hell have you been?”

The comptech lowered his head. When he spoke, Blake nearly fell over from shock—the sweet, conciliatory tone sounded stunningly unnatural coming from Avon’s lips. “I’m sorry, Restal. It really wasn’t my fault….”

“That’s what you always say. Well, you’ve wasted enough time. Get over here and get on with it.”

“Yes, Restal.”

Avon walked quickly over to the bed. He was standing sideways on to Blake, so the rebel leader could see the glint of enjoyment and lust gleaming in those usually flinty eyes. Blake was completely agog—after sixteen months, he thought he knew these two men, but it was abundantly clear that he had miscast them totally. Vila lounged on the bed, dominant and confident, while Avon played his part in what was obviously an established ritual for them.
He slowly stripped, one garment at a time. He carefully folded each item, forming a neat pile on the floor. As he drew every piece of covering clear of his body, he would pause, inviting Vila’s look of approval. The thief lay quietly, drinking his soma, watching the show. When Avon was finally, gloriously naked, Vila made a little circling motion with one finger. Avon, eyes lowered demurely, smile hovering, obeyed, flexing muscles and stretching voluptuously. He turned towards Vila again, giving Blake the biggest surprise of his life thus far—Avon’s dark-rose penis jutted from its lush bed of black curls, aroused simply by the eroticism of stripping for Vila and submitting to his appraising, masterful gaze.

Slowly, it began to dawn on the rebel leader just exactly what sort of display he might be in for. The prospect of watching Avon and Vila had embarrassed him and made him very uncomfortable, but the thought of seeing Avon subdued and conquered like this…Blake considered throwing himself on the gods’ mercies and bolting from the room. The only drawback there, of course, was that Avon was daemon, not god, and would surely kill him for seeing as much as he had already. Plus, Avon being Avon, despite this arrangement in the secrecy of his own bedroom, would surely make absolutely certain that Blake would suffer—repeatedly and often.

Blake clenched his eyes shut and buried his face in the nearest jacket—he would, at least, have the decency not to watch. Into his blackness came Vila’s voice.

“All right. Now get my clothes off me.”

Clothes rustled. Skin silked against skin.

“Slowly, slowly, don’t be in such a hurry. I want to take my time tonight.”

Blake stifled a groan—bang went his hope of a brief encounter followed by blessed sleep, when he’d be able to slip free.

“Now then, on your knees, Kerr. No, not on the bed, on the floor, where you belong. That’s my boy. You know what to do. Suck me…oh, that’s nice, that’s very nice…harder, use your tongue now….”

Blake couldn’t take any more. He wrenched open the door—and froze. Avon knelt, pale body gleaming in the bright light, jutting cock reddened, an ivory dewdrop glistening at its tip. Vila was balanced on the very edge of the bed, legs spread out in front of him, across the bed. “Over my knees, Kerr.”

Avon draped himself over Vila, inhaling sharply as his cock was caught between strong thighs and Vila’s hardness stabbed a burning brand into his stomach. The thief laid his left arm firmly across the bunched muscles of Avon’s shoulders and raised his right hand high.

“What happens to naughty boys?”

The slap ricocheted around the small room, sending a sharp jolt of pleasure through them all. Blake stifled a moan, biting into one of Avon’s leather jackets, sinking his teeth into the yielding, tensile skin. His cock jumped at every slap, a terrifying, transforming lust. He couldn’t tell what aroused him so: dominating Avon, sexual pain turned to pleasure or the sweet siren call of submission.

Vila’s voice startled him. “I asked you a question, Kerr. Answer me!” Another slap, reddening Avon’s white buttocks. “Not quick enough. What do we do to naughty boys?”

“Punish them!”

Vila spanked him again. “Not a good enough answer. You know better than that.” Another slap and another, a flurry of stinging, caressing blows. Avon gasped, breath hissing between his teeth, arching his neck back, exposing his face to Blake’s stare. The self-contained, cold comptech was flushed, eyes closed in passion, lost in his chosen world of painful de-
“I’m asking you again, now tell me. What do we do to naughty boys?”

“Make them sorry for what they’ve done! Punish them to make up for all the wrong things they’ve done! Let them pay for their sins with pain.”

“Very good, very, very good.” Exalted by the praise, Avon rotated his hips in a sinuous, erotic surge against Vila. The hand spanked him again.

“I didn’t give you permission to move, you little bugger. He plunged a finger into the tightness of Avon’s arse, making the man whimper and writhe. “I told you not to move.” Another slap. “Spread your legs.”

Avon opened his legs, stretching them as wide as he could, quivering with the agony of pleasure, trying to obey, trying to stay still. Vila pulled his finger from Avon and smacked him again, palm on his sweat-moist backside, fingers on the sensitized line from ass to balls, finishing the blow with a sweet stroking. Avon arced, plunging between Vila’s clenched thighs, while Vila held him, thrusting his fingers into him, pushing him ever higher. The thief pushed Avon off his lap, making him kneel before Vila on the bed. The dark man reached back to pull his cheeks apart and fully expose the naked nub of flesh nestled there. Vila arched forward a little, the blunt head of his cock stroking against warm skin. He used one hand to guide his wet cock and then pushed forward, driving completely into Avon. Sound exploded from them, as Vila kept one hand clenched on Avon’s backside while he fucked him hard. The safecracker used the other hand to push Avon down flat on the bed, head over the edge. The thief’s hand was inexorable and strong on the back of Avon’s exposed neck, pressing down with every inward thrust of his hips. Avon whimpered, grinding his cock against the rough covers, rubbing his nipples against the coarseness of the fabric. Vila pounded into him, balls slapping against Avon, piercing him, possessing him completely.

Blake’s hips surged forward, undulating and circling in perfect echo of Vila’s movements. The big rebel thrust into his clenched fist, fucking his hands as he imagined himself fucking Avon, sheathed in the submissive body, causing the moaning and writhing. The image flipped in his mind. He saw himself under Avon, welcoming the pounding, the thick heavy flesh stretching him wide, wider as Avon filled him. The picture transmuted again, replaced by the reality before his eyes. Blake’s fire built higher, his balls filling and tightening, thinking of them smacking against Avon....

He came with the other two, three climaxes exploding in unison, three bodies peaking then relaxing as one. Blake smothered his face against Avon’s satin top, milking the last few, precious drops of cream from his slackening penis. Vila collapsed on Avon’s back, fingers still tangled in wavy hair, cock still pulsing the last of his lifeseed into Avon’s pliant, satiated body. Avon dragged himself back to conscious thought and cleaned Vila, then started to wipe himself off.

Blake was haunted by the pit of loneliness gaping in his soul. He needed to touch them, be a part of them. Trembling, knees weak, he started to open the door.

He was, quite literally, saved by the bell. The intercom chimed and Jenna’s clear voice sliced through the miasma of sex filling the room.

“Avon? We can’t find Blake and we just sighted five pursuit ships coming up on us.”

Vila jumped off the bed and both men made a dive for their clothes. Avon was pulling his trousers on over still-sticky thighs when he got to the intercom.

“I’ll be there in just a minute.” He shoved his feet into his boots and pulled his sweater on, combing his hair quickly, to tame it, hiding telltale signs from the scrutiny of his sharp-eyed crewmates. He snatched up his jacket as he started from the room.

Blake pulled himself together and crammed his limp penis back into his brown trousers. He took a moment to wash the drying semen from his hands, then bolted for the flight deck. Avon was already at his position, as were Cally, Vila, Gan and Jenna.

“We’re up to standard by 8 now, Avon.”

“Good. Try to get around the blind side of that asteroid. They may not be able to detect us there.”

They heard the pounding of Blake’s feet as he raced in from the corridor. “Where the hell are those ships? And why are there five of them?” Blake scanned Avon’s console. Five blips were flying in deltoid formation on an intercept course for the Liberator. Avon’s course correction would put them on a
retrograde course, keep them from detection—always supposing, of course, that the ships hadn’t already noticed them. The great ship fled through the void, seeking some semblance of safety.

The Liberator slowed, then came into a fixed orbit, poised behind the dense asteroid. The ship’s occupants were still, all attention locked onto Zen’s viewscreen. Vila whispered, “Keep going, keep going,” cold fear oozing from his every pore. Moments elongated and twisted as the five lethal craft passed close, too close, to their protective asteroid. Finally, the formation continued on, oblivious to the prize so near to them.

“Bloody hell! I thought they were going to get us that time. I shall break out in a rash, if that happens again. Oh, my poor heart started there.”

“Pity your poor brain didn’t do the same. Now shut up, Vila.” Avon turned on Blake, “That was too damn close. You were supposed to be on watch—where the hell were you?”

“I could say the same of you! I needed to consult Orac, so I went down to Subcontrol 4, where you said you would be. When you weren’t there, I went off to look for you.”

“Leaving the flight deck unattended? Blake, I hate to spoil your illusions, but this is hardly a Scouting trip. Our lives—my life—are at stake here. You can’t just go wandering off like a curious child simply because you can’t remember what two and two make!”

“Oh, I know exactly what two and two make, Avon.” The comptech stared at him, suspicion stirring, two and two beginning to add up in his own mind. “And there’s no need for you to raise your voice like that, Avon—you sound like a hysterical queen.”

Avon stalked closer to Blake, stopping scant inches from him, flaying the big rebel the accusation in his eyes. The timbre of his voice was indigo velvet—the kid glove hiding the fist of iron. “Would you care to repeat that? Or are you a coward as well as stupid?”

Synchronised, Avon and Blake spun on their heels away from each other. The eye of the storm hovered uneasily over the flight deck, all the others dying of curiosity, but considering that far better than the certain death of reopening this particular kettle of fish.

It was well into the night before Avon had corrected Zen’s programming to a satisfactorily alert status. He went to his room and downed several pills to drown the fatigue and anxiety eating him alive. Blake, meanwhile, was still slouched in the rest room, having downed enough potions to blur the sharp edges of the chaos eating him alive. His reaction to Vila and Avon had been, to put it mildly, confusing. Cally sat opposite him, patiently waiting for him to speak.

“You’re wasting your time, Cally. As I’ve already said, I can’t even begin to discuss it.”

“And why not?”

“Because…because it would mean revealing things about Avon and Vila that I shouldn’t even know, let alone gossip about.”

“You are talking, of course, about their sexual proclivities, the way Vila dominates Avon?”

Blake almost gave himself a nasty case of whip-lash, he snapped his head up so quickly. “You knew?”

“You’re right, Vila. This is neither the time nor the place for this,” Avon said. He turned his basilisk stare back onto Blake. “After I have checked Zen, you will come to my room to discuss certain matters between us.”

“Oh, shall I, indeed?”

“Naturally.”

“And if I opt not to accept your gracious invitation?”

Avon smiled maliciously. “Then I shall opt to leave the Liberator—and your precious Cause needs me, even if you do not.”

“Don’t threaten me….”

“Then don’t spy on me!”

“I wasn’t spying, for god’s sake. It was….”

“Innocent?”

“Far from it. To be perfectly honest, I’m very disappointed in you….”

“You are disappointed in me? You sneak around, poking and prying where you don’t belong. If you see things that….”

Vila piped up, “Personally, I thought your original idea was better, Avon—not to mention easier on the old ears. All this shouting’s giving me a shocking headache.”

Synchronised, Avon and Blake spun on their heels away from each other. The eye of the storm hovered uneasily over the flight deck, all the others dying of curiosity, but considering that far better than the certain death of reopening this particular kettle of fish.
Cally looked at him with affectionate contempt. “Of course I did. I am a telepath, Blake, I sense people’s thoughts and feelings, especially when it’s someone strong and intense, like Avon. And I don’t see why you’re so shocked. Those two together like that, well, it makes perfect sense.”

“How the fucking hell can pain make sense? Tell me that!”

“Yelling and swearing at me does not help the situation, Blake. Sexual domination games are to be expected when men from their background are involved.”

“Their background? Cally, Vila is a Delta-5th Grade, which is the lowest of the low and Avon is an Alpha-elite, which is miles higher than even I am.”

“Materially, perhaps, they are diametrically opposed, but emotionally, psychologically, it is a very different matter. Have you never talked to them about their pasts?”

“Ask Avon about his past? That’s absurd.”

“Is it? You’d be surprised how willingly he will speak to a caring non-judgmental listener.” Blake shot a sharp look at her for the pointed emphasis.

“Well? And what did sweet, open, communicative Avon reveal to his non-judgmental listener?”

“The self-same history of emotional and sexual abuse, coupled with outright neglect that Vila has.”

“What!”

“As Avon would say, give your brain some exercise, Blake, and think!” She glanced at him impatiently. “Look, money and position have nothing whatsoever to do with it. Vila never knew who his father was—his mother claimed he was an Alpha, a regular customer of hers. She disappeared when Vila was only 11, so he was abandoned to the streets.”

“But the social services….”

“Apparently don’t pay too much attention to the service grades. Now, as for Avon…well, his parents bought him everything there was, provided him with the best-trained nannies and governesses and tutors, but emotionally speaking, they abandoned him the day he was born. He always knew he was only an insurance, a way to keep the old family name alive, should anything happen to his elder brother.”

Blake stared at her, trying to absorb this. He had heard stories like this, and far worse, before, but it was quite a different matter when people you knew were involved. Guilt began to settle in a churning lump in the pit of his stomach. He hadn’t asked, hadn’t suspected…hadn’t cared. All he had wanted was for them to further the Cause, to risk all for his beliefs.

Cally watched his face pale, then continued. It was past time for Blake to be reintroduced to the slimy underbelly of society. “Of course, like so many outwardly normal people, they both have a history of being abused. Vila was taken in by a woman who ran a crimo ring. While they were young enough, the children were prostituted to pædophiles, for sex and viscasts and the like. Later, when they reached puberty, they either continued in prostitution or were trained in other crimes.”

“Which is where Vila learned his trade.”

“And why that’s the one thing about thieving he refuses to talk about.”

Blake rubbed his hand across his face. Of course, he had noticed that little detail, but hadn’t bothered to follow up on it. “Just said, Vila, open this, Vila steal that….” He looked up at Cally. “Tell me about Avon.”

“Ah, yes, Avon.” She got up for another cup of tea, busying herself with milk and sweetener, marshalling her thoughts. Somehow, it seemed worse for Avon. “Until Anna, there was only one person Avon believed actually loved him. That was his brother, Bartolomew. Unfortunately, Bart was a bully, and a pædophile. He was eight years older than Avon, quite old enough to manipulate and molest a helpless child. It was the usual story: touching like this means I love you, but if you tell anyone, they’ll know you were very bad and they’ll hurt me and take me away from you forever.” In his mind’s eye, Blake could see Avon’s brother, saying the all too common words she had just quoted.

“And then Avon would be left completely alone. But surely, someone could have stopped it….”

“Who? Who is going to believe a fanciful, imaginative, moody child, telling a tale like that about his perfect older brother? Blake, you don’t understand. There was no one who cared enough, no one Avon could trust.” She watched impassively as Blake staggered over to the sink and splashed water on his face. She could feel his pain as if it were her own, but he had to go through this. If it were left to fester unspoken between the three men, then surely, the Liberator would not survive.

Blake whirled around. “But why Vila? Why pick Vila to…do this kind of thing?”

“Because Vila understands! Because Vila has a…complementary need. Two different personalities, Blake, taking different lessons from the same teachings. Avon learned that ‘love’ was sex with pain. Vila took it from the opposite side, that giving pain of that
sort was how one expressed love. Or simple lust, for that matter.”

“So in a twisted way, they fit together, balance each other out.”

“Perhaps. At least they can fill the other’s need.”

Blake sat down heavily and cast a questioning glance at Cally. “You don’t seem to disapprove? Is this kind of thing common practice amongst the Auronæ?”

“Indeed it is not—it is common practice amongst your people, Blake. However, I see no reason why I should pass judgment on what two people do behind locked doors.” She made him meet her eyes. “Speaking of which, Avon only told me that you knew. He didn’t say how you found out.”

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“I needed Orac’s key, couldn’t find Avon, so I went in to his room…”

“…and when he came back, you didn’t want him to catch you red-handed, going through his private belongings.”

“Yes. I hid in the wardrobe, thinking he’d just popped back for something. Instead, I saw…everything.”

Cally leaned on the table, bringing her very close to Blake. “And how did you feel when you saw them?”

“I was…I don’t know.”

“Why are you lying to me, Blake?”

“I’m not!” Her accusatory glare squeezed honesty from him. “Well, perhaps I’m not telling the entire truth.”

“You’re not telling anything at all! It’s very important that you face this. Now, tell me, how did you feel?”

Blake got up to pace the room, trying to sort through his conflicting reactions. “I’m honestly not sure. I was horrified, repulsed, angry, torn….”

“It aroused you, then?”

“How can you say that?”

“By the very strength of your denial, by the way you unconsciously rubbed at your groin, and because I’m a telepath. I’m a very hard person to lie to, Blake.”

Blake grinned at her. “I had forgotten that.” He sat opposite her, serious again. His nervous fingers broke a biscuit into tiny pieces as he spoke to her, revealed things to himself. “Part of me was sickened by what I saw.”

“What sickened you? The sex, the pain, the dominance?”

There was a very long pause. Blake looked at her, a hint of fear in his eyes. “I… I was sickened by my-
going to do to Avon. She knew his mind, was too familiar with its fragile hold on cohesive reality. Plus, Blake’s confused, shifting attitude did not bode well.

“Ah, Fearless Leader. Do come in. I see you decided to knock this time.”

“Avon….”

“You don’t need to say it. I’ve heard it so often I can quote it for you. “Let’s not start off fighting, we must try to have an honest exchange and sort this out.” Close enough, Blake?”

“Verbatim, Avon. But then, you’re very good at parroting phrases, aren’t you?”

“Into the heart of the matter so quickly? That’s hardly your style.”

“The heart of the matter?”

“I thought ‘parroting’ was my speciality.”

“Avon, stop dancing circles around me. It’s late, I’m tired and I may well have had one over the eight. Let’s just get this over, shall we? I was wrong to come in here, it was worse to hide, worse still to watch. I’m sorry, I apologise most profusely, I deeply regret it ever happened.” Blake turned on his heel to leave Avon’s room for the second time that day.

“Do you really think that a flowery, insincere apology will wipe the slate clean?”

“Insincere? Oh, Avon, you have no idea of just how sorry I am.”

“For yourself, not for your intrusion on me—and Vila.” The tech was boiling with rage, fists clenched at his sides.

“Listen, I really do wish I hadn’t seen you. For all our sakes. If we don’t handle this right, it could tear the Liberator apart.”

“The crew, probably, but I doubt if the ship will even notice our heinous secret.” He deliberately unclenched his hands and examined his fingers, as though checking that the always immaculate nails were clean. “Have you told the others?”

“Of course not! I have discussed my reaction with Cally, but that’s all—and she already knew the general gist of what goes on in here.”

“Naturally.”

“She said…you would talk to her. Why, Avon?”

“What you mean is why her and not you, right? Because, Blake, she listened. Even though it didn’t affect the damned Cause, she listened to me and I knew she, at least, wouldn’t judge.”

“And were you so sure that I would?”

“Oh yes, there was no doubt at all. You only pay attention for the great, glorious Cause and individuals be damned. You judge everything and everyone against your own insular moral structure.” He glowered up at the big rebel. “And you can be shockingly, offensively…naive.”

“How can that possibly surprise you? I was mindwiped, for fuck’s sake! I don’t remember my past—Avon, I don’t even remember if I’ve ever had a man!”

“Or a woman, for that matter.”

“Precisely.” Blake felt drained, exhausted by his tension and the angst bleeding from Avon. The tech spoke again, voice almost whimsical, completely changing the tone of their confrontation, bewildering Blake even more.

“Do you ever feel…desire?”

Blake glanced at him and decided to go along with whatever the comptech had in mind. Warily, he answered honestly. “Well, not exactly, no. I don’t think so….”

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean? Either you do or you don’t. I rather think it’s similar to being pregnant. She either is, or she isn’t. So do you lust after others or not?”

Blake laughed. “I definitely don’t lust after anyone, Avon. But sometimes, I feel…a tension, a restlessness. For some reason, I associate it with sex.”

“I can’t think why,” Avon said in a droll little voice. “So,” he continued, “they suppressed your libido, too.”

“Yes, obviously,” Blake admitted dryly.

Avon didn’t move, didn’t change his expression, but Blake felt the mood shift again. The tech spoke. “And with whom—or what—do you experience this strange, unidentifiable sensation?” He smiled seductively. “Or do I need to ask?”

Blake backpedalled, mindful of his high-principled decision. Unfortunately, alcohol was befuddling his already confused mind. Sex was one area where the mindwipe seemed most convoluted and the most erratic. “That depends, of course, on whom you’ve guessed is the recipient of these…faint stirrings.”

Avon came closer to him and smiled challengingly. “It’s me, isn’t it You’re drawn to me and you didn’t know why?”

“I think now I know why but I don’t think I could actually….?”

“Bring yourself to touch the pervert?” Avon snarled bitterly.

“That’s not what I’m trying to say! It’s just that….” He paused, rubbing his fingers along his lips. “This
challenge/submit game we play…it’s sexual for you, isn’t it?”

Avon sighed in exasperation. “After what you saw, you still have to ask that? Of course it’s bloody sexual for me. What the hell else did you think it was?” He relented slightly, sighing heavily. “It always has been.”

“Your brother?”

“Well, now, Cally really does talk rather too much, don’t you think?”

“Actually, I thought she didn’t say enough.”

Avon’s mercurial temper, made even more unstable by the drugs, flared up. “What are you after, Blake? The gory, sordid details? Do you want to hear how Bart blamed me for everything that went on, telling me that I was the one who wanted it, that I enjoyed it best when it hurt?” He stood toe to toe with Blake, glaring at him, making the big rebel retreat. “Do you really want tales of sodomy? Of my beloved big brother’s friends? Well, do you?” He suddenly turned away, wrapping his arms around himself.

Blake stood impotently behind him. He was sure of only one thing: he wanted to clean Bart’s shadow from Avon, take the smaller man and hold him safe, away from all the hurts the universe inflicts. He reached out, whispering the tech’s name softly. He rubbed Avon’s tense back, tenderly easing the knotted muscles, sliding his hands around to clasp his waist. “It’s all right, Avon. Lean on me, I’ll take care of you,” he murmured, bringing his mouth up to Avon’s ear. He nibbled and nuzzled, feeling Avon’s weight rest against his ample strength. Blake’s desire rekindled, Avon’s scent going straight to his head. An avid mouth devoured his, opening wide, silently asking Blake to take control. The burly man responded, feeling himself growing larger, feeling his sense of self swell. He turned Avon, bending the smaller man over his arm. The tech groaned against him, pliant and amenable. Blake lowered him onto the bed, tongue thrusting into his mouth, shoving Avon’s hand against his crotch. The tech obeyed the silent command, unzipping Blake’s trousers, masturbat- ing his turgid flesh.

The rebel pulled back for a moment, staring in astonishment at Avon’s passion-filled face. The tech’s hands were trembling against Blake, his breath panting from him in great gusts. He lay on the bed in wanton abandon, licking his lips, undulating his hips in a classic bump-and-grind. Blake groaned and leaned forward, ripping Avon’s shirt in his driven desire to get at the man. The tech laughed, pulling Blake hard against him. Suddenly, he twisted under the big man, rolling out of his reach. “To have me, Blake, you have to get me first.”

Blake grinned, enjoying the game. He growled, “I’m coming to get you. You’d better run.” He lunged after the tech, his longer reach letting him catch Avon easily. Playfully, Blake wrestled with Avon on the bed, both men rippling and writhing with the other. Blake pinned Avon, but a quick twist freed the small man from Blake’s firm grip. The tech snaked under him, suddenly changing the wrestling into serious sexuality, mouth sucking its way down Blake’s torso, stopping only when he came to the waistband of his trousers. Head still level with Blake’s navel, he looked up through long lashes. “Well now, I know you’ve been mindwiped, but surely even you can remem- ber that one usually takes one’s clothes off first.”

Blake tangled his hands in Avon’s hair. “So strip me.”

Avon did, using his teeth to lower Blake’s zip, while Blake kicked off his shoes. Avon’s eager hands pulled the baggy corduroy trousers off and tossed them aside. A mouth settled on Blake’s engorged penis, filling him with almost blind sensation. He shrugged his shirt off, tearing at Avon’s clothes until he finally had the man naked and on his knees. The symbolic pose inflamed Blake and he grabbed Avon’s head, needing to thrust deeper into the wide mouth, needing to fuck him. Avon gagged at the suddenness and depth of the penetration, but Blake just pulled the struggling head farther down onto his hardness. Retching against the enormity in his throat, Avon tried again to pull free. Blake drew his hand back and cuffed him on the side of the head. “Why are you pretending? You know this is what you like, you know you can’t have your sex just straight. No, that’s boring, isn’t it? You need the struggle, the strength….” The big man returned both hands to the back of Avon’s head, using his hair to pull and push in the rhythm he wanted. He went on and on, ignoring the tech’s muffled moans, telling himself it was passion, feeding on it. On the verge of coming, he withdrew abruptly from Avon’s mouth. The tech heaved in great gulps of air, massaging his tortured throat. Blake turned from him, rifling through the bedside drawer. He found a tub of gel and coated his ach- ing cock with it. He was almost purple with congested blood, cum oozing from the tip. Avon was crouched on the bed, wide-eyed, a wounded waif.
He paled when he saw how big Blake was. Blake’s lust roared at the helpless sight.

“Blake,” he whispered, “I don’t want to… I don’t want you in me.”

Blake grabbed him and turned him over, forcing him on all fours. “Don’t fucking lie to me, you little bastard. You’ve been trying to get me to do this since the London. All those snarls and sneers, just a way to get me like this, just your way of seducing me. Well, this time, you’re going to get what’s coming, you’re going to get what you’ve been begging for….”

Despite the tech’s frantic strugglings, Blake roughly manhandled Avon into position at the edge of the bed, face in the covers, backside in the air. Words flooded brokenly from the tech, his voice catching, quavering. Blake spread the white cheeks, moaning in anticipation when he saw the tiny pink bud cradled there. He leaned forward, leaning his full weight on Avon’s slender back. The comptech turned his face to the side and Blake saw his expression. Gone was the passion of before, gone was the ecstasy written there when Vila had plunged into him. Avon’s eyes were screwed up, tears stealing from between the cage of his lashes. Leaning forward as he was, Blake could make out the words. “Please don’t; oh please, no. Not this, you know how much this hurts, I’ll do anything else you want me to, I’ll be good, I won’t tell. Please, oh please don’t, Bart….”

Reality dashed cold water in Blake’s face. His erection shrivelled, all desire fleeing before the sickening knowledge of the hideousness he had been about to commit. He reeled forward, leaning his full weight on Avon’s slender back. The comptech turned his face to the side and Blake saw his expression. Gone was the passion of before, gone was the ecstasy written there when Vila had plunged into him. Avon’s eyes were screwed up, tears stealing from between the cage of his lashes. Leaning forward as he was, Blake could make out the words. “Please don’t, oh please, no. Not this, you know how much this hurts, I’ll do anything else you want me to, I’ll be good, I won’t tell. Please, oh please don’t, Bart….”

Avon’s bitter, biting laugh stopped him. “Oh, no, Blake, don’t even think about comparing what Vila does with what you tried to do. He and I have a… an arrangement, but everything is mutual, everything is, to ‘parrot’ a phrase, between consenting adults. There’s no real force there, no real pain. A bit of bondage and discipline, perhaps, but that’s all. I have as much control as he does and we both know that as soon as we walk back through that door, everything is just the same as before. In a sense, it’s all false. But you,” he looked at Blake with the betrayed eyes of a nightmare-ridden child, “you wanted the real thing, you wanted to possess and hurt me, you wanted to literally have me at your feet, accepting you as my master.” His face twisted with disgust. “And I almost let you.”

Blake raised his face from its hiding place in his shaking hands. “But that’s not true.” His fractured thoughts had cast aside the memory of his conversation with Cally, his fragile emotional stability had run screaming from the things he had glimpsed himself. “I didn’t want to do that to you. I’m not like that….”

“<For what>?”

Avon stared directly into wary brown eyes. “Rapists, molesters and sundry bastards.”

Blake felt nausea rise. “I’m not a rapist.”

“No? Then what, precisely, did you have in mind to do to me? Certainly not sweet romance.”

“<For what> I did? Avon, I was doing what you wanted, what you’ve been trying to provoke me into for the past two years!” Blake lowered his voice, dropping it below hurricane level. “I was just doing what Vila….”

Avon’s voice stormed over them. “Even if I did, how can you possibly use that as justification for what you did?”

“How the fuck do <you> know? You were mindwiped, your past ripped away. The slate wiped clean.” He leaned forward, an ugly expression on his face. “Tell me something, Blake. How do you even know that those molestation charges against you <were> faked?”

Blake’s eyes filled with horror, terror seeping into
him. He was lost, whirling adrift. "No, Avon, no. Not children, I couldn’t do that...."

"Just like you couldn’t rape me?"

"But I didn’t, did I? I stopped. Avon, please. I did stop, I couldn’t actually do it. I don’t know what even got me started behaving like that...." He pleaded with Avon, begging him for help. "What kind of man am I?"

Avon sighed wearily, all the fight suddenly draining out of him, leaving him filled with nothing more than sorrow and pity for both of them. "You’re just like so many of us, Blake. Abuse done to us as children comes out later, when we try to abuse someone else. We use the same methods other people used on us to prove that we do matter, that we are important...that we are men."

He wiped his cheeks, mildly surprised to find traces of tears. Blake reached hesitantly to offer comfort, but withdrew slowly, miserably, when he saw the other man’s reaction. "You’re just like so many of us, Blake. Abuse done to us as children comes out later, when we try to abuse someone else. We use the same methods other people used on us to prove that we do matter, that we are important...that we are men."

"But to think that I might be capable of something so terrible, so...monstrous." He shook his head. Keeping his eyes downcast, he said, "I can’t undo what I tried to do, but...."

"Oh god, today’s been bad enough already, Blake. Don’t start hitting me with nobility. My stomach’s quite queasy enough as it is."

An incredulous brown stare met a cool, dark one. "Joking, Avon? After what just happened?"

"What else is there for us to do? We could sit here and go over this again and again ad nauseam but it won’t help. What’s done is done. I can’t leave, you can’t leave, but there can never be any trust between us."

"I still trust you."

"Do you? For once, give your brain some exercise and think, Blake. Do you fully believe that this little fiasco was entirely your fault, or is there still some part of you thinking that I provoked it? And do you trust me not to provoke you again, whether intentionally or not?" Blake opened his mouth to answer. "No, don’t say anything now. Think about it.” He gave Blake a wry smile. "You always wanted to know why I keep so distant from people, why I don’t like them. You can’t even begin to imagine what my life was like. Everyone thought it was so perfect, telling me how lucky I was...."

"But you hated it."

"Naturally. I have seen people at their most insensitive, at their crudest. I’ve seen exactly how depraved and petty and vitriolic they are.” He paused for a moment, not sure whether or not to go on. He had already said more than he had ever thought he would, to Blake. He breathed in, calming himself. “I also got to see the depths to which I was capable of sinking, and that is just as low as everyone else.”

"Hence your cynicism. You expect the worst, because you’ve seen the worst.”

"Because I’ve been on the receiving end of the worst.” There was a very long pause. “Because I’ve done the worst.”

“But,” Blake hesitated, knowing he had no right to ask this, but knowing also that this rare, intimate discussion was the only chance he and Avon had of remaining together—and the only chance Blake had to begin to forgive himself for the darkness within.

"But surely, with your background, the last thing you’d want is Vila...” He stopped, trailing off delicately.

"Spanking me? Blake, haven’t you listened to a single word I’ve said? That’s entirely different. There’s no abuse involved there, just something we both enjoy once in a while, something that fills a need in us. It is, for us, a form of comfort, a healing. What you wanted, was...slavery. Emotional and sexual obedience. To have me kowtow to you, to lick your boots on the flight deck."

Blake stood up quickly and strode as far away from this devastatingly perceptive man as he could. He rubbed at the back of his neck, beginning to see how emotionally unstable he had become. After Star One, he would take a very long holiday and just think. Nothing else, just think. He glanced at Avon. "I never believed that I could be capable of that."

"Well, at least you did stop. This time."

The ominous words hung between them for a long time, as they stared one at the other. Blake finally came back to the bed, sitting down, carefully, not coming too close to Avon. "How the hell do we live with this?" he asked, almost begging.

Avon shifted uncomfortably. Offering emotional guidance was never his forte. "Well now, there’s an interesting question.” He fiddled with his hands, noticing the knotted veins and prominent muscles of a hard worker. His grandmother would have chastised him for that, once...." I know how I shall live with it.” He gave Blake a cursory glance. "I shall ignore it."

"That’s not going to help."

"It’ll help me,” Avon hissed back at him. “You really have got a cheek, haven’t you? First you try to rape me, then you come whining to me, asking me how to live with yourself. I shall ignore it, Blake, for
I did nothing for which I should feel shame. You, however, have to find some way of dealing with the fact that you are no messiah, no saint, no better than any one else. You, Blake, need to find some way to accept that you are as capable of being an utter bastard as the cruel masses you are fighting this damned crusade for."

Blake shook his head in denial. "Oh no, you don’t, Avon. You’re not going to visit your bitterness on the entire population, just because of what I did."

"There are times, incomprehensible though it seems, when you are a bigger fool than Vila. Blake, look at history. If you can’t remember that, then look at today." Avon knelt forward, trying to make Blake see. "The people you are wanting to free are the same people filling the ranks of the Federation. Where do you think Servalan gets her troops? From the average city, the average family, the average man. The one you so nobly wish to free."

Exhaustion was eroding Blake, leaving him a numb, baffled, battered lump. "I will not believe that people are as evil as you say they are."

"Whyever not, Blake? After all, you are."

Once said, words cannot be unsaid. Blake looked at his accuser. His erstwhile victim suddenly felt profoundly, deeply sorry for this man, watching innocence die, seeing in Blake what he had felt in himself those long, painfilled years ago. Blake’s voice was broken, a reflection of the man within. "I am, aren’t I? Look what I tried to do to you….”

"Yes, well, but you couldn’t actually bring yourself to do it, could you now?"

"No….”

"I’d prefer a little more conviction there, if you don’t mind. Now try it again."

"No. I couldn’t do it. I saw it was hurting you and I stopped."

"So perhaps you are the only saint in the galaxy, after all."

Blake stretched his hand out to Avon. It stalled between, as unwelcome as a plague ship. "Will you ever forgive me, ever let this rest? Or will it always be a weapon between us?"

The pills Avon had taken were wearing off rapidly and he felt his body and spirit sag. "If it is, then it shall simply be one more in the arsenal, won’t it now?"

"Why does it have to be that way? Avon… I don’t know how to put this, but I think there is a part of me that… might love a part of you."

Avon smiled at Blake and the melancholy pain there startled the rebel. "Love, Blake? Not the selfless love you have for the masses, but rather a consuming drive to own, I think.” He got up from the bed, making sure the cover stayed wrapped around him. Facing Blake, but his gaze averted, he slowly dressed, taking a sweater from the drawer to replace his torn shirt. "That’s why no matter what we may feel, or think we may feel, you and I will never have more than an armed neutrality."

"Why? Why can’t we grow, change? I have seen a part of me I didn’t know existed. But now, now I can get rid of that, now I know it’s there, I won’t let it out."

"Ever the optimist. Or the fool.” Avon straightened the sleeves of his jacket, smoothing his sweater. He went into the bathroom to brush his hair, acting, from obvious practice, as though nothing untoward had happened. When he re-emerged, Blake was still sitting where Avon had left him, perched on the edge of the bed, unclothed. Avon threw Blake’s shirt and trousers at him. "Get dressed and get out. You will not be here when I come back."

"Avon.”

"The tech didn’t turn from the doorway. "Avon, at least now I know what I’m capable of. I can control that, bury it where it can never hurt you.”

Avon sneered at him. "It, Blake? You make it sound like it’s a separate entity. I hate to disillusion you, but it isn’t. It’s you, yourself. And until you accept that, you are a terrible danger to me."

"Avon, I will never try anything like that again."

The comptech turned on him, anger rising to join the pain in his eyes. "For once, you’re absolutely right. Because I won’t give you the chance to ever betray me like that again!"

"That’s what’s the worst for you, isn’t it? The trust thing.” Blake, by now, had his elbows on his knees, trembling hands cradling his throbbing head. He appeared the very picture of abject misery. He looked up at Avon, a new thought dawning in him. "Something you said….” The tech was intensely wary, poised for flight. "You said, you almost let me do it. That’s the crux of this whole thing, isn’t it? More even than trusting me, you feel you can’t trust yourself. That’s it, isn’t it? You’re afraid you’ll end up under my heel, and liking it, just like that bastard brother of yours trained you to be.” Avon was frozen, like a tableau titled ‘fear’. "Oh, Avon….”

"Oh Avon nothing. The farce in here never happened, do you hear me, Blake? Nothing happened
between us. NOTHING!” He bolted, running to
breathless refuge in the computer room.

Blake spent several minutes sitting on the bed,
staring at the empty door where Avon had been.
Eventually, he dragged himself off to dress and
wended his weary way to his cabin. He stared at the
ceiling for a long time, unable to sleep, unable to
think. Life was a convoluted mess, wreathing around
him like smoke. He couldn’t deal with Avon, couldn’t
deal with his own murky secrets, couldn’t deal with
anything. Gradually, he centred on his Cause, on free-
ing the masses, on making them noble. By taking
away the sleaziness Avon saw in them, Blake could,
perhaps, wash the muck from himself. Grasping at
straws, he turned his mind to thoughts of Goth….

It was night. The separate individuals on the Lib-
erator were at rest, as best they could. The charges
were ready, the plans set, the final destination almost
within sight. Avon sighed and stretched, easing the
aches in his lower back. He had done everything he
possibly could: the ship and the computers were as
prepared as he could make them. He stiffened as
Blake came on to the flight deck.

The big rebel was at least as uncomfortable. “Time
for my watch, I think,” he said. “Anything going on?”
“No.” He almost got off the flight deck without
incident, but he couldn’t quite ignore Blake’s quiet
voice.

His mind was heavy, he could feel deep depres-
sion and guilt slithering in under his barriers. He
stopped by the galley for a bite to eat, but then
realised that his stomach would rebel most violently
if he were to do anything so foolish. He tossed the
food into the disposal and walked dispiritedly to his
cabin, stopping at the door, straightening his spine,
readying himself for his interminable battle with in-
somnia. The door opened. Light spilled into the cor-
ridor suffusing him with warmth and a welcome
sense of homecoming. He smiled. From within the
room came a voice.

“You’re late…. “