VI
AND SO IT GOES:
THE DOME CYCLE

This is part three in an ongoing cycle of stories. As much as the editor dislikes serializations, she recognizes that the Glaswegian never intended to go beyond the first tale, and that since that wee storyteller has consented to continue our heroes’ adventures, the editor will have to take whatever the Glaswegian decides to dole out. And when she decides to dole it. With luck, there will continue to be new Dome Cycle stories for at least several more issues of Oblaque.

If you're a new reader to the series, welcome. These tales occur in an alternate Blake's 7 universe (as, unquestionably, do all B7 slash stories). This particular universe diverges from the broadcast version quite early on and takes us to the heart of the Delta levels within the Domes on Earth. Here we are treated to a detailed look at this underclass and we experience both the richness and the ongoing horrors of their lives through the eyes of Avon—a stranger in a strange land—and Vila—the Prodigal Son indeed. Now, with Blake back in the picture, both Avon’s and Vila’s lives begin to change. For the better? The worse? And, of course, there is family. Always, there is family.

PROMISES, PROMISES…

M. FAE GLASGOW

THE WORST THING ABOUT BEING IN LOVE, HE thought, was how it hurt those you merely loved. With every step he took, he could feel the hopeless, helpless hurt in Vila’s eyes stabbing him in the back, asking the unanswerable. And how was Avon to even attempt the answering? How the hell was he to know what had happened, what had led to that kiss? Certainly nothing he had expected, certainly not this falling like the proverbial ton of bricks, and most definitely, not this falling at Blake’s feet. He shifted his attention slightly, giving only the most peripheral thought to where his feet were taking him, his focus, drawn by forces far beyond Avon’s control, to the man at his side.

Blake. Hirsute and gaunt and decked out in clothes that were to have been for his execution, but Blake nonetheless. A fact which Avon’s body was appreciating to the fullest, all of him aware of the strength of the man bounding along beside him, his vibrancy. His potency…

An overlooked guard dodged out from behind a door that lay ajar, and Avon shot him, without even bothering to look at him properly. After all, he was nothing, just someone who was threatening Blake, and that not a wise thing to do, considering what Avon had just discovered about the rebel.

I am, or so it would seem, in love with him. Head over heels, besotted, blinkered and blind, rose-coloured glasses doing nothing whatsoever to bring reality into focus. No doubt, as soon as the first flush wears off, sanity shall hopefully return, but for the moment… For the moment, there was Blake, only Blake, and all the silent promises held within that body, all the hopes, all the dreams. To return Upstairs, back to his own milieu, back to whence he had come and what had made him; to be freed of a daily grind so grey that it washed out the higher aspirations, to be freed of the cloying openness of emotion, the vivacity of the Deltas being rammed down his throat with such complete disregard for Alpha sensibilities. To be able to go home again!

But those eyes were burning into his back, still asking the unanswerable.

What about us?

What about me?

He shivered away from the questions, loping along the bright and exhilaratingly clean corridor, one part of him, even amidst everything else, so gladdened by the measurable cleanliness hear, the very floor they walked on...
better washed than old Doctor Harpie’s examination room. Calmly, serene in the ballet of violence that surrounded him, he destroyed his foes, neither knowing nor caring who they were, thinking only that he was going home, that he was returning to a place where he wouldn’t have to pretend, a place where he could doff the Delta mantle and just be himself. To simply be. What luxury, what pure, unadulterated luxury.

Unadulterated. Vila. The night before, vows made. A name, taken. Vila, floating away on Cloud 9… That brought him up short, the conflict beginning its tarnishing of his technicolour dream. Vila, who was running along behind him, watching his back, being habitually brave, just not bothering to hide it the way he usually did when he was amongst Alphas. How the hell was Avon supposed to juggle this? A vow made under the coercion of what he thought was a death sentence, should he have to leave the Delta levels; a man who was unabashed in his love of Avon, to the point of wanting to have a ‘quickie’ in full view of his entire family at last night’s party; and then, of course, there was Blake. Damn Blake anyway, for making him feel this, for making life so damned complicated anyway, damn Blake just on principle for being Blake. And then all hell broke loose, cascading them with fire and bodies and blood, making all questions of love moot before the overwhelming drive simply to survive. Inundated with carnage, they all three lost sight of each other, just as the Rebels eventually lost sight of Servalan, unleashing her to fight another day. Each hour blended into the next, punctuated with bloodshed and pain, until, with Servalan routed, the organised counter-offensive collapsed and the tide slowly began to turn in favour of the Revolution. No one had much time for anything other than fighting and killing and trying to survive.

And survive they did. All of a sudden, on what he didn’t realise was his third consecutive day, kept going by stim-tabs and will, the curtain of exhaustion parted and Avon stopped, took a deep breath, looked around to see whom he had to kill next and there was… No one. No one at all. He was alone in an empty room, papers and disks and memory cubes strewn, confetti at the funeral, blood and scorch marks decorating the place like wreaths. And the memory cubes strewn, confetti at the funeral, blood and whatever. Either. Both. Just something to get him out of the maze of emotions and people and commitments… The laughter seeped from cracks in his mask, then, chittering around the room, doing nothing more than making the emptiness emptier. How absurd, how truly absurd, to be sitting here, in a parlour filled with death, thinking about sucking on a gun as substitute for the man he had, mere hours before, discovered he loved. The only way it made sense is if he were to shoot the bloody thing and get the whole mess over and done with before it got any worse. Damn you, Blake, damn you for damning me…

And then, there was always Vila. Footsteps crunched along the remains of busts, grinding plaster and marble into the plush carpeting. Deathly grace moved Avon’s limbs while his mind was still registering the sound. Quickly, he moved, a wraith sliding from one point of the room to suddenly be elsewhere, as the tread came closer. Heavy steps, ponderous and flat-footed, giving no indication of just how fast the walker could suddenly run.

“This.” Avon stepped into the rectangle of light that lingered from broken tubing.

A quirked eyebrow, the quick twist of a smile, then all buried under a montage of what this man had seen and done these last days. “Shouldn’t you have at least waited until you knew it was me before setting yourself up as target practice?”

That initial moment, in the condemned cell, came back full force, catching Avon a glancing blow to the midriff, stealing his breath, his chest rising and falling with the simple effort to breath. “Blake,” he said again, in a very different tone, meaning something very different indeed. He smiled, warmth spilling forth, lighting his face up with something frighteningly akin to joy. And adoration.

Blake took half a step back, literally and metaphorically. There were people coming up the corridor, dozens of them, and this wasn’t exactly a propitious moment for him and Avon to celebrate their reunion. At least, not in the way Avon had in mind, judging by the confessions of his body. “Later,” Blake said to that promise in Avon’s body, making promises of his own. “I’ll sort things out with you later.”

An elegant hand reached out, a single long finger briefly touched the scant inch of Blake’s chest that could be found between the buttons, the skin touching skin directly over Blake’s heart. “All right. Later. Now, I suppose, is hardly the time. Once your entourage departs, come with me, Blake.”

Such a simple statement, but the allure of it was devastating. Blake felt all his resolve dissolve under that stare, under that finger, under the heat in those brown eyes. He took half a step forward, Avon’s finger slipping against sweat-moist skin, and Blake could feel the tiny tremble of
“Yes,” he whispered, agreeing to far more than the words had spoken. “Oh, yes.”

And then it began.

“Blake!” called a man, a baboon in orange suit, sheaves of printouts in hand, modern man’s banana bunch. “Blake, we need a decision on this water sedation policy. If we just cut off everyone’s supply, we’re going to be finding people having psychotic incidents all over the place. Don’t forget, all the marginal minds aren’t treated… they just given the placebos and told to drink 3 glasses of water with each one, so if we just stop, then what will happen…”

Avon tuned him out, returning once more to the maroon sofa, slopping back into a slouch, letting his body collapse. But he didn’t—quite—put his gun down. It had been soldered to his hand for so many hours now, killing so many, saving so many, and he was so terribly, terribly tired… He forced his eyes awake, getting to his feet, going over to Blake, stumbling only a fragment. “Enough,” he said, in the voice Blake had once used, “enough!” The baboon had been replaced by a willow, a tall, thin blond man, all yield and no strength, to Avon’s eyes. “Enough,” he repeated, voice fading even as he did, his paalty reserves ebbing through his feet and into the carpet, “enough…”

Arms large with strength and comfort were around him, leading him away, taking him, the voice said, to somewhere called ‘rest’. He didn’t believe it—after the past three days, he didn’t think anyone knew where ‘rest’ was. His tongue, obviously, was as loose as his resolve, for it appeared that he had actually spoken.

“Course we know where to get rest. Some of us have been doing that, unlike some people I could name. Every time I looked for you, you were leading some raid, solving someone else’s problem…” ‘Starin’ after Blake with yer bloody ’eart on yer sleeve, an’ I don’t care if everyone else thought yer were scowling at ’im, I know you an’ I’ve been on the receiving end of enough of yer bloody scowls this past year that I c’n tell the bleedin’ difference. “Upsadaisy, Avon, that’s better. Don’t fall asleep yet, not before I get you into bed.”’

Hah! Chance’d be a fine thing. Ge’ yer inter me bed? That’ll be the bloody day. Not now yer’ve seen yer fancy man, not now tha’ bastard Blake’s stuck ’is nose in again. I’ll be for the off, right? Off with the old, on wiv the new, an’ compared wiv wot ’e’s got ter offer, I’m pretty shabby, in’t I? “Oh, come on, Avon, you can do it. Not much farther to go now.”

“Vila?” Avon straightened himself up as best he could, walking with a little less of his weight being taken by Vila. Squinting in the light, he stared around, trying to cow the weaving surroundings into stillness so that he could work out where the hell he was. He stared and glowered, putting one foot mechanically in front of the other, just going wherever Vila was leading. “Where the hell are we?” he finally muttered, allowing his head to droop, just a tiny bit, just enough to ease the strain on his neck.

“We’re on Upper Level 1, Section 3A, Corridor 7. Recognise any of it yet?”

The address rang a bell, and eventually the bell woke his brain up. “Of course! I grew up here. My family’s house is…”

“Right here.” They came to a stop in front of a stoa crinkled with age, the nameplate a discreet and dignified rectangle set to the side, where none could accuse it of joining in with the door’s ostentation. Before Avon could actualy get his mouth to do what his brain was screaming at it, Vila chimed the door.

“Vila! What the hell made you bring me here?”

“Good choice of words, that. What the hell made me bring you here was our beloved Blake. Him, and one of his new rules. “Due to the damage sustained by the Upper Levels, all personnel must return to their home levels and where known, their family homes. As soon as damages are under control, a de-stratification of grades will take place.” Or words to that effect, anyway. So, his wish is our command and here we are.”

The door swung open, unscathed of course, by anything so uncouth as mere tawdry revolution, and Thatcher, elegant even in morning whiskers and pyjamas, stood in the doorway. It took a moment, but recognition dawned, even going so far as to show on his face. “Sir! How lovely to see you again. And so exciting, for we’ve been hearing all about your derring-do. You must be quite exhausted and as it’s still rather early, would you care to come in to the sitting room whilst I see to getting the spare bedroom prepared? I’m afraid your cousin Wills is in your old room, sir. Lord Avon is not at home and the Lady Waylz your mother is indisposed, but I shall inform her that you’re here.”

Out of it all, the only thing that Avon really heard enough to care about was the promise of bed. And one thing that no-one had mentioned: “Tea, Thatcher,” he said, the words fuzzy, like an inner pocket. “Tea, and something to eat. I think it’s been quite some time…”

Thatcher’s words rumbled unheard as Vila supported whilst Avon steered, the pair of them finally stumbling across the sitting room. Avon plonked himself down on the nearest chair, too exhausted to even bother taking his boots off. It never entered to head that, before Blake and Liberator and Vila and the Delta level, it would never have occurred to him to take his boots off in the sitting room. But now he just sprawled back, too numbed to think about Blake and his complications that the man carried with him like a miasma of contradictions. All he could focus on was the fact that he didn’t have to make any more decisions, didn’t have to race down any more corridors, didn’t have to kill… China clinked, spoons clinked, plates slid from the pile to be filled with the things Avon hadn’t had since the day he’d been arrested, an entire æon
ago. Vila, then, again, at his side, urging him to eat, handling the delicate bone china as if it were made out of Avon Family bones and not just some heirloom or other. Gradually, Avon sat up, taking the proffered food, his befuddled mind slipping so easily into the lessons drummed into him by Nanny. ‘Sit up straight—a lazy back means lazy digestion. Keep your plate steady—your dropped crumbs are someone else’s work. Don’t slurp—you’ll sound like an animal and be taken off to the zoo.’

He drifted off with it, mechanically eating, part of his mind quite comfortable watching Vila, storing it all away for when he was awake enough to actually look at it. And then the perfume was there, jasmine and tea-rose, so sweet, so wonderfully sweet. Home. That was the smell of home...

“Mother,” he said, rising to his feet, grace only slightly defaced by his stumbling tiredness.

“Kerr,” she said, offering her left cheek for a peck whilst keeping her beady eyes on the strange little man her son had brought home. She did so hope it wasn’t one of ‘those’, not another one. Kerr did have such bad taste. Not to mention his appalling lack of discretion. That one, awful mid-term vac when he had brought his ‘best friend’ home and then expected them to be given the adjoining suite and left unsupervised! She shuddered to remember, and then, still with her younger son seating himself so untidily, she shuddered when she took a good look at the other man...

“And you are...?” she enquired, as politely as if she were asking an acquaintance what breed of dog this was.

“Vila. Vila Restal,” Vila Restal murmured, stuttering a little, breaking out in even more sweat, making him even more uncomfortably aware that, what with a revolution and all, he may have had time to grab some sleep, but not quite a shower. And the way her face was screwing up like wadded paper, she knew it. He suppressed the desire to sniff himself, just to check. He had an awful suspicion that she could probably smell him from there.

“Restal? I don’t believe I know your family!”

“Well, no, don’t suppose you would. We’re not Alphas, you see.”

“Really?”

An’ now I know where our Avon gets that toffee-nosed attitude of ’is. “No,” he said, his back up against her snootiness, temper and tiredness getting the better of him, “I’m a Delta, actually.” An’ so’s yer bloody son, by our rules, you old cow, he added, but silently. He rather fancied keeping his head attached to his shoulders for another little while. At least until he had done something to try and keep Avon. Perhaps if he were to live Upstairs, be an Alpha...

The real Alpha male was stirring, pushing himself to his feet. “He’s also my friend, mother.” And he could see the speculation scud across her face, storm clouds bringing rain and how he hated it when Mother turned on the tears. “Please,” he said, going slowly towards the door, “shall we continue this discussion after I’ve had a chance to sleep?”

“Yes, of course, Kerr,” his mother responded, the perfect hostess. “And I’ll have Thatcher see to having a bed made up for...for...” How on earth did one address a Delta? “A bed for Vila. Yes, I’ll have Thatcher see to Vila.” And Avon, tired beyond thought, inured to the iniquity on the Liberator and fresh from the familial intimacies of the Delta levels, didn’t even notice that his mother was speaking to Vila as if he were a rather flea-bitten pet. All his exhaustion would allow his mind was the siren-song that dangled rest for him to chase. He was, peripherally, aware of someone helping him along the corridor and into the lift, of someone—he remembered the feel of those hands suddenly, going limp, relaxing into their security—of Vila helping him discard his stained and noxious clothes, wiping him down with stericloths, tucking him in as if he were a child come home once more, not simply a man temporarily returned to his family’s house.

A kiss then, light, fleeting, whispering remembrances to him, and then he was falling asleep, body cradled in aromatic bedding, the old, familiar scent of lavenderclouds bringing rain and how he hated it when Mother turned on the tears. “Please,” he said, going slowly towards the door, “shall we continue this discussion after I’ve had a chance to sleep?”

And on that thought, he was asleep, only then freeing Vila’s hand, leaving Vila alone in a room that intimidated with its living aura of good breeding, of generations and centuries of history and power. Of a family so well-bred that even the servants were borderline Betas, the kind whose children would be able to cross the grade, were such things allowed. The kind of servants who would pass for masters to an ignorant Delta, who was suddenly becoming acutely aware of his own putrid clothes, with their stench of blood and fear, but most of all, worst of all, with their lingering perfume of poverty, of the great unwashed, of struggle, and of failing. He looked around this, the ‘spare’ guest room, the place that the unexpected was tucked away into, to be dealt with later,
once class had been established. There was art on the walls, real art, not holos. Ornaments, that to Vila were missiles in a domestic argy-bargy, littered the mantles and tiny, tip-toeing tables with aged elegance. And fabric. Everywhere he looked, there was fabric, cloth covering the walls, the chairs, the couch, the floor, the bed… And there was Avon, clean again, eyes closed, fine bone structure perfect in this place of artistic excess, belonging as he had never even come close to doing in the places where Vila belonged. And there was always Blake, and his directive for Grades to return to their levels, and his hold on Avon… Vila perched himself on the edge of the bed, clumsy in his own tiredness, almost knocking the figurine off the spindly bedside table, thief’s hands catching it, thief’s instincts dropping it mindlessly into his pocket. Then he simply sat and stared at Avon, longing to crawl in beside him, but not daring to, not here where one didn’t even laugh publicly. And not when he was the wrong Grade to be here, for even if Blake’s proclamation hadn’t banned him, the sanguine elegance here surely had. Plus, he was nervously aware that Revolutions were amongst the most uncertain of times, and Vila didn’t want to be some anxious Revolutionary’s first big mistake, so he gathered his reluctance into a tangled ball along with his unhappy chaos and then he leaned over again, stroking Avon’s hair, kissing him once more, just to tide him over until they had some time together. If Avon ever wanted to again. If Avon could ever see beyond the end of Blake’s nose again. If Avon could ever slum it with a Delta again… Staggering with tiredness, he clambered to his feet, climbing down off the high bed, stretching to ease the pulled muscle in his back, then turning, to be confronted by the sight of a tall, dark woman, perfectly coiffed, perfectly dressed, even amidst the greatest upheaval her society had known. Avon’s mother. So like him, yet so very different. The coldness, here, was not merely camouflage for a molten nature, but simply the flawless maquillage for the chill that lived within. Politely, no doubt. Vila took a deep breath, casting one quick glance at Avon’s obliviousness as he walked away. Lady Waylz didn’t speak to him, barely allowed her glance to be contaminated by touching him, doing nothing more than lifting her right hand, palm up, as he came abreast of her. Dumbfounded, Vila stared at her for a moment, until the heaviness in his pocket registered. Blushing, too embarrassed and intimidated to even do his usual patter, he dug in deep, dragging it out, clinging bits of paper hanky and all, and placed it in the accusatory palm. Guiltily, he fled, burglar’s memory guiding him through the maze that was the Avon House, getting him to the front door and freedom in record time. It wasn’t until he was cramped into the service lift that he even realised that he had been running, driven by the gene-deep, bred-in generation-upon-generation feeling of inferiority. The lift lost a few of its occupants at the various Beta levels, giving Vila room to breath, cursing him with thinking-space, and every time the lift doors opened on the light and warmth of the sundry floors to decant cheerful revolutionaries, the iniquity of it stung a little sharper. Even more got off on the Gamma levels, until Vila was completely alone, with nothing but those emasculating thoughts careening, drunk drivers, through his mind. When the lift finally groaned to a halt, stopping at the only Delta off-load bay, the solitude had finally begun to infiltrate his senses, bringing numbing depression with it. Alone. Going back down to the Delta levels, the only one to ever leave and then come back again. The last time, it had been because he had had no choice, this time, was exactly the same thing. Lorded over by Alphas and their decisions, he had to move, pawn on their chessboard. It married into the brood that was the tangle of Avon and Blake shutting him out of their emotions, of Avon loving a fellow Alpha with a passion he had never shown (never known, a fragment of fairness whispered to his conscience), of Alpha sensibilities so far above his own that they scared him. Once married, the resentment and the fear and the hurt started the mating dance, beginning to breed, propagating, fuelling each other until Vila was finally able to stand tall again. As the doors opened onto the dim-lit chill, Vila strode through, a man to be reckoned with. ’Mongst the fuckin’ Deltas, any road. Got a Revolution on our ’ands, so we ’ave, an’ we’ll bleedin’ win. If we ’ave ter fight the Alphas themselves, we’ll fuckin’ win. Jest cos Blake’s got wit ’e wants a sudden cruel image of Avon bent double under Blake, Blake’s big cock piercing him, stabbed Vila in the heart, causing his feet to stumble and his resolve to harden jest cos e’s got ’is power an’ my Avon, don’t mean e’s got ’is pet Deltas runnin’ and fetchin’ fer ’im. Jest wait until e tries any o’ it. Jest wait…

When he awoke, Avon simply stretched, warm and replete and comfortable, the delicate aromas of rosemary and mint doing a minuet in the air. Luncheon, he thought to himself, not yet quite awake, rubbing his face into the lavender-misted pillows, vaguely aware that his world smelled odd, for some reason, I must have had quite a night, for mother to allow me to sleep till luncheon. Oh. I did have quite a night, didn’t I? Quite a few days, in fact… He got himself out of bed, picking up the dressing gown that had been draped at the bottom of his bed, going into the bathroom, still yawning and stretching to ease the kinks. A servant knocked discreetly, then entered, revealing a young face Avon didn’t recognise.

“Good morning, sir. May I draw a bath for you?”

With a raised eyebrow and a nod, Avon disappeared into the toilet, the sound of rushing water echoing behind.

And then, lying in the bath, hot water turning his shoulders pink, the smile faded from his face. What Deltas would give for this… This bath held more than their weekly per capita amount, a decadence they would never
even consider, not when it would mean doing without drinking and cooking water. It suddenly dawned on Avon, that one of the pervasive Delta smells was absent from here, too. The underlying acridity of the chem-toilets. He sank down deeper into the tub, enjoying himself. After all, they had had a revolution and Avon had won. He was free, and by now, Jess and Vera and old Ewan and Jak and his gargantuan brood would be enjoying this kind of thing too. Might take a few days, granted, simply to reprogram the computer distribution systems, but soon… The last few days began to catch up with him and his eyes drifted closed, even as his mind drifted shut on thoughts of contacting Vila, and Blake…

By the time he appeared downstairs, luncheon was already served and progressed to the point of the main course. He hesitated at the doorway of the dining room, rather unfortunately aware of the last time he had joined his family for lunch. That had been the week before he had been caught embezzling all those funds, the week before his arrest, the time and the life before the Liberator and Blake and living as a Delta. He squared his shoulders and walked in, prepared for anything. Anything, that is, apart from what he got.

“My dear boy! Do sit down. I’m so glad to see you up and about in time for luncheon.” Father? Smiling? My father, being positively effusive?

“Ah, Kerr, darling. Your place is beside Daddy. Thatcher, bring Kerr some luncheon, please…” Mother? Fussing? Over me?

“You must tell us all about your adventures, you know. It must have been so exciting, freeing everyone like that.” Avon spared a glance for his brother Geoff, that vacuous, virtuous bore, personality as bland as the blond of his hair. Then he gave his attention up to his favourite, his baby sister Sian, all vivacity and cheek and bright brown eyes, the only one who ever came close to receiving his baby sister Sîan, all vivacity and cheek and bright brown eyes, the only one who ever came close to receiving his attentions. Conversation flurried, a scree of comments landsliding into another, all of it trapping him, making it as if he had never left, never robbed the Federation, never been brought up in a family vehemently opposed to reform of any kind. And now he was some kind of hero to them. If the food hadn’t been so good, the hypocrisy would probably have made him sick.

And so it went, the silent surrender to all the things that had been bred into his bones, as surely as defeat had been bred into the Deltas. Perhaps it was that that made him accept all the excuses as to why Vila was too busy to come Upstairs to see him. Or perhaps it was the complexity of it all: it had been difficult enough Downstairs, amongst people who were cheering for them, but to live with him here, amongst his family and his peers, who understood school-boy dilding but no more… And certainly not if it took place between men of different Classes. Between elite and Delta was thinkable only in the realms of esoteric pornography, and that old attitude began to infiltrate Avon, as it had barriered him once before. And there was, of course, always Blake…

The anticipation of their time together was a constant aching tumescence between his legs, the picture of Blake moaning under him interfering with his work, the thought of himself coming, streaming into Blake’s heat was making familial conversation impossible. Sitting here, in the office he was all-but chained to, reprogramming the agri-computers and sedative controls and food distribution and water programmes, trying to concentrate on his work, he was far more aware of his cock chafing against the coarseness of trousers, and the hurt threatening to erupt in his heart, were he to listen to it and not his body. He didn’t care to think about Vila, and what must be going on Downstairs, for there was far too much for all of them to do to allow time for love and sex and sorting out a triangle that he should never have been weak enough to allow to happen. He couldn’t deny that he did love Vila, in his own way and after a fashion, but compared to what had hit him right between the eyes when he had seen Blake… A memory wound its way, leisurely, through the cortex of his brain again, as it had so many times these past few, frantic days. Vila, lying in bed with him, ready to love him generously and unconditionally, telling him that Avon was in love with Blake. And he hadn’t denied it, his conscience knowing it for the truth even if his consciousness hadn’t yet seen what was staring him in the face. He had accepted Vila’s warmth and comfort then, not with lies of undying love, but with an apology. “I’m sorry,” he whispered again, not even realising he was saying it out loud to a computer that couldn’t have cared less. I’m sorry, echoed in his mind. So many regrets, to be weighed against so many happinesses. All he could hope for was that for Vila the good outnumbered the bad. Until such time when Avon could find the depths within himself, the courage, to face Vila, and Blake both. Hardest of all, to face himself. For, as he had conceded in the grime and sleaze of the Delta levels, he was a man who liked men, not merely an ‘old school boy’ who still enjoyed the occasional reminiscent tumble. A man who loved easily, and deeply, and all unwisely. Almost impossible to admit to himself even with the balm of being so far from home and all that stood for, but he had done it, going so far as to say it out loud, Affirming with Vila. Yes, that sneaky little voice bit at him, but you did it in Delta, didn’t you? Disguised, not being yourself, and you still haven’t dared to see Vila, in case it shows. In case everyone up here would see it written on your face like a dirty mark on your nose that you love a Delta. That you fucked a Delta. That you almost let a Delta fuck you… No, he hadn’t let Vila take him, the disputes of the moment had stopped him, class intervening yet again. But he had fucked Vila, in the metaphoric as well as literal sense. Well, I can sort all that out later, once the worst of the work is over. And once I know where the hell I stand with Blake. Please God, if
there is one, let Vila and me be wrong. Let it not be that I am in love with Blake. Let it just be lust... He shifted on his chair, rubbing his living hardness against the manufactured, thinking once more of Blake. Thinking about being in bed with him, kissing him, as he had in that first, fiery and unguarded moment of shocked recognition. Thinking about all the times he had found himself in officious meetings with Blake, hordes surrounding them, coming between them, all the decisions needing made at once, instantly and perfectly, so that only the messiah of freedom could pass judgement. For all of them, was the time and consideration, life and death pigeonholed and tied up neatly in little blue ribbons. And all Avon and Blake could get were snatched moments, stolen kisses, groins rubbed hard and desperate against each other until one of the plethora of aids would come knocking on the door. This time, he swore, it would be different. This time, he would have Blake, come hell or high water or police crisis, he didn’t care. He was going to have the man...

His computer was chiming at him, the inanimate rather animate in the annoyed tone of that incessant chime. Avon sighed and keyed acceptance, warily wondering which particular programming crisis needed solving this time. Complex equations dissolved into something far more complicated. Blake.

“Avon, glad you could find a moment to finally answer. Are you, by any chance, available to have dinner with me tonight? We could use the opportunity to discuss the best re-integration strategy together.”

“I suppose, if you’re willing to give up the bad habit of demanding instead of asking, I could find the time to dine with you.” He was so proud of himself, none of his aching need betrayed by word or expression.

And then the bastard smiled at him. Warmly. Promising, as he had done that very first day, as he had the day exhaustion had claimed Avon and Vila had dragged him off to sleep... 

“Vila, the zephyr grazed his mind, but he stamped it out. Later, he promised himself, later... Blake was still smiling at him, eyes crinkled, suggestion ripe around his full mouth. And Avon realised that he had what was probably the most embarrassingly hungry look on his face since his years of teenage desperation. Damn you, Blake, tinged with indulgence of new-born love, I’ll get you for that. If you’re lucky, it’ll be tonight... His cocked jumped enthusiastically to attention at that, making Avon doubly glad that he had made sure to tuck himself discretely between his legs this morning. Life was proving embarrassing enough without his body proclaiming his state for all to see. And Blake was grinning at him now, relishing the sight of a blushing Avon whose lips were parted, begging to be kissed.

“How very...accommodating of you, Avon,” Blake finally said, not letting Avon off the hook.

“Really? From past experience, I would say that you were the more accommodating of the two of us.”

“Traditions are made to be changed, Avon, wouldn’t you say? Revolutions can make the most unexpected differences in a man’s...anticipations, you know.”

“I haven’t found that to be the case, I’m afraid.”

“Oh, but you haven’t given it enough time yet. I’m sure I can...persuade you to my point of view.”

“Over dinner?” Arch now, verging on coy, loving this open flirting.

“Over something, anyway.”

“My dead body, probably.”

And Avon’s heart suddenly tangoed wildly at the lust in Blake’s eyes and what that promised. “Only a little dead, Avon,” he said, dipping his fingertip into his mouth, continuing, depending on Avon’s equally well-bred education being up to the seduction, “only le petit mort, Avon, only that.”

“I shall...hold you to that, at any rate, Blake. Dinner tonight then?” he added, needing to get away from those devouring eyes before he made a complete spectacle of himself.

“Why don’t you come over to my rooms after the last of the day’s meetings? Then we can guarantee not being disturbed.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t plan on that, Blake. I’m planning on ruffling every feather you’ve got.” And with that, he broke the connection, shutting his console down, almost running from the room and the transparent walls and all those interested voyeurs. He hastened to the bathroom, still holding close the image of Blake smiling at him, the rich voice carrying him along until he was locked in a cubicle, trousers wrenched open, cock tugged out from its restraints, hand pumping, slickened into sliding pleasure by the pre-cum oozing, pushed by the promises of Blake, his voice, the smile, the pictures he had so wickedly painted for Avon, that voice pouring over his skin, beading him with sweat as his hand blurred and was beaded by white cum. His breathing slowed, his cock lost some of its rigidity, but the need was still there, the desperation to feel Blake’s mouth on his, his legs spread under Avon... All of it, oh, how he needed it. Needed Blake to need him, to love him as he feared he loved Blake.

The cubicle door opened and he emerged, barely a hair out of place. Hands washed, hair smoothed, clothing perfectly neat, he walked back to his office, his cock trapped, rubbing, rubbing, rubbing, constantly reminding him of Blake, Blake, Blake... An afternoon can take an eternity to pass, nit-picking meetings can become even more interminable than ever imagined, the sight of the man you are in love with sprawled comfortably in an oversized chair can be sheer torture. As he wriggled on his seat yet again, trying vainly to find some degree of comfort that wouldn’t set his cock off, Avon found himself staring at Blake, oblivious to the discussion droning meaninglessly around him, speculating on whether or not that sprawl was one of comfort, or if it were dictated by necessity. If that
wide-legged ease was relaxation, or a cock that wanted attention, as Avon’s was weeping for the touch of one of those capable, strong hands that were absent from rubbing a long thigh muscle… He barely managed to stifle a groan, dragging his eyes away, but only for a moment. He couldn’t bear not to look, couldn’t bear to think that if he blinked, he’d missed the restless move that would reveal if Blake were hard, whether he was carrying right or left, up or down, or if he were completely disinterested, mind ruling his body, as Avon’s body seemed to be tyrant over mind.

The baboon of the orange suit, now wearing something suspiciously akin to lime, was staring at him. Perhaps, Avon thought on a bubble of hysteria, he has a ‘thing’ about fruits… He straightened his face, well aware that this was a very serious meeting—they were all depressingly, self-importantly, deathly serious—and that despite his jocularity, coming to terms with oneself being a fruit really was not a subject for levity. The meeting evaporated around him, and he found himself remembering things that he had been quietly ignoring: his time amongst the Deltas. They had used humour for everything, having wakes after the harvesting raids, celebrating life and cocking a snoot at death. If he were with Deltas… He grinned again, earning another stern stare from the lime-wrapped baboon, which he didn’t even see, let alone give any notice. If I were with Jak and his crowd, down at the Hanged Man, all I’d have to do is announce to Vila that I have a fruit really was not a subject for levity. The meeting evaporated around him, and he found himself remembering things that he had been quietly ignoring: his time amongst the Deltas. They had used humour for everything, having wakes after the harvesting raids, celebrating life and cocking a snoot at death. If he were with Deltas…

Blake dominated the room, for Avon wanted him to. He filled all the empty spaces, for all Avon could see, hear, smell, breath, was Blake. And what they might end up doing. What he might end up doing…

“Avon.” Calm, non-committal. With an alacrity that stunned him, Avon wanted to hit the man. How dare he be so unbothered, when Avon was going insane with the love and the wanting?

“Something to eat?” Blake asked, being the perfect, polite Alpha.

“NAH, I DON’ FUCKIN’ WELL WANT SUMMAT TER EAT!” The full-throated yell probably shocked Avon more than Blake, were that possible. He dragged some calming air into his lungs, forcing himself to remember who he was. And where he was. “Stop it, stop it, you’re not with the Deltas. Not here, get a grip, we’re Alphas…” “All I want to eat, Blake, is you. I want to devour you, have every part of you all for myself.”

Hands slightly unsteady, Blake turned towards the dispenser, a frown marring his features. “Dinner first, I think,” he said, ignoring Avon’s outburst as any decent host would do. “And I think we need to talk about the meeting today.”

Avon heard the unspoken. “We can discuss my behaviour today to your heart’s content, but later.” He snaked a hand up Blake’s spine, dipping his fingers into luxurious hair, leaning his forehead on the broad shoulder. “We’ve waited so long, Blake. Let’s go to bed, now, before one of your sycophants can find some other momentous decision for you to make. Come to bed, Blake,” he whispered, using voice and hands and wet tongue-tip to seduce. He mapped Blake’s nape, pausing to ease the pressure on his cock. He didn’t dare touch himself: he knew how terribly little it would take to make him cum. Not much of a problem, however, for he knew his body. Keep it this desperately in need for human contact, masturbation notwithstanding, and it wouldn’t even notice the first ejaculation, wouldn’t even register the first orgasm as a signal to deflate. No, it would simply scream for more… And Blake would give it to him. Blake…the man was big, very big, and for the first time, Avon considered the possibility of letting Blake fuck him. A disturbing reality, to say the least, and not only for the physical aspects, either. To give of himself like that, to yield, would be to… He shivered, getting up, restlessly prowling the room. It didn’t do to live something before it happened: planning was for the practicalities of life, not the emotions. One can’t plan passion, one simply indulges it; one certainly can’t plan love, one merely copes with it as best one can… A sound, and Avon felt his blood heat. Yes! Ohgod, it’s him, he’s here, finally alone, together, to finish what we started when I set him free…
you. Remember it, Blake? How it felt, to be so close, all that skin on skin, hard against each other. Remember how it feels to have me caress your balls, or suck on those beautiful nipples of yours until they’re all swollen and red and standing up as straight as your cock? Remember?"

And Blake remembered, with every fibre of his being, remembered the fire and the glory and the lust, remembered Avon’s face, twisted with orgasm, sweat dripping from him as he came, the cold sweat burning Blake as it rained on to him. Yes, he remembered. And his body ached with the needing… “Later,” the word bled from him, to be absorbed by the heaviness of Avon’s breathing, “later, for everything else. Hell, I need you…” He turned within the circle of Avon’s arms, pressing them close together, fumbling with Avon’s clothes, locking their mouths together. Avon’s tongue was on him, in him, taking over his mouth and his breath and his being, and he roared with the pleasure of it. Hands came up to be lost in his hair, as Avon had always so loved doing, and then suddenly, those hands clenched, spasmed, trembled, Avon’s mouth falling lax and empty, body leaning into Blake.

“I’m sorry,” was murmured into Blake’s neck, as the bigger man realised what had just happened. A single kiss, to break his control like that… My god, how much have you needed me, and me too busy to see? One kiss, just one kiss… Oh, Avon, my poor Avon… I’m sorry, so sorry…” And then Avon was pushing against Blake again, genitals regenerating, all that needing and longing making him forget that he was no longer a rapacious teen, bringing his cock to stand on its balls, the head flaring, foreskin drawn back to cradle the flange in a symphony of satin skin. Blake’s hand delved deep, finding Avon, drawing him forth into the light, the rose-dark cock mysterious and beautiful in the lamplit glow. Avon was tearing at him, ripping his clothes, biting and licking and sucking in a frenzy, claiming every pore as it was revealed to him, and to him alone. He caught at Blake, holding on tightly to the heaviness of Blake’s balls, fingerling them, running his thumb up between them, separating them to frame the column of Blake’s cock. Dewy skin, supple over the immutable hardness, heat drawing him, the honey-sweet smell bringing him down, lower, lower, until his mouth was on Blake, sucking him in, tasting him, for the first time, daring to go beyond school-boy rules, compromising his Alpha dogma with his Delta lessons. It inundated his senses, this bringing in of Blake, this confession before his equal. He loved it, Blake so thick in his mouth, the head smooth against his teeth, the flesh so springy under his tongue. Blake’s hands were clasped together, braces on Avon’s nape, urging him down lower, persuading him to take more in, deeper, as deep as he could. Mouth straining, Avon swallowed him, his left hand forming a tight tunnel for what his mouth couldn’t take. In unison, hand and mouth moved, making Blake harder, making him grow, bringing him to his full size. And it was only then that Avon was satisfied, holding his prize in his hand, Blake’s rampant, daunting masculinity, overflowing his palm. He squeezed, leaning forward to press them belly to belly, cock to cock, his hand rubbing them one against the other, skin whispering sexy secrets to matching skin, pre-ejac slipping them so sweetly together. His own clothes were an unwelcome impediment, so he pulled them off, the leather clinging, only reluctantly letting his flesh go. He was desperate for this, aching to fuck Blake, to experience whatever it was that had combusted that second when they were reunited. Desperate, but not entirely mindless, not yet. One quick blur, and he had rescued the tube from his breast pocket, keeping it in one hand as he took Blake in the other and led him, cock first, to the bedroom. And love? Perhaps, perhaps, if life wanted to be difficult…

The bed was wide and smooth and piled high with feather duvet, pillows abounding, in Servalan’s signature white. Escaped though she had, Avon doubted she would be coming in to demand just exactly what they thought they were doing in her bed. Too besotted to care, he tumbled on to the bed, bringing Blake with him, kissing him even as they fell together, gluing them to each other. He twisted, bringing himself into position over Blake, uncapping the tube, getting ready… And Blake grabbed it from him, using his strength, that thrilling strength, and the intensity of Avon’s own needs. Implacable, unsmiling and unspeaking, Blake loomed over him, refusing Avon room to move, refusing Avon the right to choose. There was a struggle, all the more intent for its silence, and still Avon would not yield. Could not yield, for that would lead to… He chose not to allow that thought birth, aborting it before it could come between them and render all of this impossible. Avon arched up to shove Blake off, and found himself, instead, pressed hard and needy against a body just as hard and just as needy. But the difference, this time, was that Blake was not willing to give Avon the upper hand, that this time, Blake was the one who needed the control enough to stop all of this if Avon refused him his right. There was a moment, when it hung in the balance, and then Blake finally spoke.

“I’ll give you everything you need, Avon, but you’ll have to give me what I need. And that’s you, all of you, just for me and no one else. I have to have you, Avon, the way you’ve had me. That’s what it has to be. Me, taking you.” And Blake touched him, staying Avon’s struggle, silently, eyes speaking volumes, leaning down to kiss him, turning him, until Avon knelt on the bed, rump raised, arse presented for Blake’s pleasure.

And Avon went very still, thinking about this, about giving himself to a man, to Blake… Ramifications, repercussions, all of it went through his mind, until he realised that it mattered not a jot. He wanted this, regardless of what it brought, regardless of whether it made him a nancy-boy. Regardless of whether or not it forever
branded him a man who loved deeply, and often, a cynic by disguise. He groaned out loud, letting Blake hear his concession, the sound a declaration of intent. He would let Blake have him, take him, make him... The first slither of ointment was cold, unwarmed by Blake’s hand, in contrast to the steadying, reassuring pressure of palm on Avon’s cheek. The first finger touched him, pressing in, brooking no argument, demanding surrender. The second finger, opening him, beckoning the penetration by more, by bigger. Then Blake’s hand on his shoulder, pushing him down, until his face was on the pillow, nipples rubbing counterpane, forearms braced in anticipation. Then, oh, then it happened, the blunt, broad head of Blake’s cock hard on him, pressing inexorably, insistent on its pleasure, asking for nothing, demanding everything. Pain, sharp, burning, expanding, widening his muscles, unfolding his sphincter, making his arse swallow Blake as his mouth had done. That made his cock listen to his age, going soft, the pain draining the blood from him. He thought of Vila, impaled under him, the twist of pain on that face, those first few times when Avon, like Blake, hadn’t waited, hadn’t taken the time or the love to overcome the emotional anxiety. I’m sorry, he thought again, not saying it this time, but it was the same old refrain, I’m sorry, for the hurting and the letting Blake be the one to do this to me... And then, as Vila had with him, he grew used to having Blake in his body, as he was growing used to having Blake in his life. The pressure against his prostate began its magic, blood pulsing into his cock to be held there by the slow ups swell of pleasure. Another deep touch, and another, until his mind was filled with the image of himself under Blake and the image of Vila under himself, the two commingling and multiplying, until suddenly, his own cock was weeping against his belly, the joy of penetration overcoming any pain; the pain receding, as Blake held still for a breath, and then the movement began. Primal male, plunging into him, plundering his very essence, manhood mingling with his manhood, every thrust pounding down, until his face was on the pillow, nipples rubbing bigger. Then Blake’s hand on his shoulder, pushing him up,更快, faster, both men undulating and writhing, and then Blake turned him, dominating Avon with Avon’s own willingness, manoeuvring Avon around, cock still buried deep within, unable to bear to give up that most intimate of loving. And on his back, spread like a woman, a man fucking him, Avon saw a part of himself he hadn’t even known existed: the desire to give up everything to this man. In love, it chanted through his brain, cantering down to every nerve-ending, in love, in love, in love, his mind mocked him, making him face himself. Making him face the bottomless well he had never even suspected was in him. Love. Boundless, generous, giant. Love, in love, making him want to yield, to hand everything over to Blake, to keep the man happy, to... He shivered, not entirely from the pleasure. He wanted, (ohgod, ohgod, his fear screamed, somewhere far away in the darkened depths of his soul) to bind himself to this man, to commit to him, for ever and ever, amen... Willingly, no strings attached, no reciprocation required, as Vila had with him (Vila, oh, hell, Vila, my poor Vila, I’m sorry, so sorry, the weeping voice joined the fearfilled chant), giving without thought of receiving, this boundless wealth of his love. And then Blake thrust into him, driving his cock deep into Avon’s body, driving thought far from Avon’s mind until Blake, nearing the end, grabbed Avon’s legs, lifting them high, hands bruising as they steadied Avon’s hips, as he thrust so very hard into the hot, yielding suppleness of Avon’s arse. Blake bent down, kissing Avon, stealing his breath along with his heart, joining them mouth and hip, an umbilical cord of loving, as cum streamed from Avon, his body jolting with release, Blake surging up, hips snapping forward in one last, juddering thrust, cock spasming deep inside as Avon’s prostate quivered against him.

And then it was over, Blake collapsed into Avon’s waiting embrace, Avon dizzy with the emotion of it all, body finally limp and sated after the agony of anticipation. He whispered to Blake then, whispering into an ear that could not hear him, the intensity of climax having claimed Blake for sleep. Words poured from Avon, as his life blood had poured from him, drenching Blake, giving him his all. For the first time in his life, Avon said it, said the words that had the power to make him sick with fear. Said them again and again, cleansing himself, freeing himself, casting off his shackles and embracing the future, and Blake.
“I love you,” he whispered. And then louder, “I love you.” And then a whisper again, a faint flicker of breath in Blake’s hair, as Avon joined him in sleep. “I love you…”

And as he slept, he dreamt, of things forbidden, of love fulfilled. He dreamt of a future of possibilities, of himself, happy, of Blake, at his side. He dreamt of his lover and he having a home, having somewhere they belonged and somewhere that belonged to them, and them alone. Magic, it was, to dare to dream such filigree dreams, fantasies forged of the lacework of steel, Avon’s deepest desires rising up to ambush him with hope.

A voice, rich, rumbling from a chest Avon’s hands remembered so well, the pliancy of skin over muscle… The voice, a little louder; hands, not quite so gentle as before. “Avon,” he heard, “Avon, wake up.” He struggled out of the cotton-wood swaddling, blinking slowly at a hazy reality.

“Hmm?” he managed, already beginning to drift off again.

“Oh, of course,” he answered himself, sneering, a petty indulgence of a large hurt, an entire government, it seems only reasonable that…

“I really can’t be bothered getting up just now, so I’ll leave in the morning. Why don’t you,” voice terribly blâse, “set it for 5 or so, that should make sure no-one will see me as I leave.”

Blake answered by mutely keying the alarm, and settling down for sleep, recumbent on his right side, bedclothes pulled up until only his hair peeked out for Avon to feast his eyes on. And as Blake’s breathing deepened into sleep, Avon lay beside him, wishing for a lumpy old bed with a dip in the middle, to give him cause to roll into him and embrace Blake. But he had no excuse, and didn’t dare, for if he did, then surely those damning words would burst his dam and come thundering out. One thing to say them in the foolish afterglow of passion, for that, Blake would forgive him, but to repeat them, cold and sane and sober… He’d be banned from Blake’s bed, exiled, into the realms of queerdom, where he’d be banished from touching, not even the most innocent gesture of affection tolerated. For he, and the truth was bitter bile in his throat, may be in love with this man, but it was obvious his man thought nothing more of this than ‘old boys’ together, the ongoing echo of their formative years, a secret aberration, to be kept away from watchful eyes. The reflected shame began its work on him, worming its way under the unfurled love, sweeping it up into tidy little piles that could be all the more readily squashed underfoot. He began entombing it, hiding it away again, along with his still-born dreams. Slowly, step by step, he began the painful rebuilding of the perfect Alpha-élite that he should be. Layer by layer, he buried himself alive…

He was, without doubt, getting heartily sick and tired of the skulking. The agony of the first few times had dulled to an irritating toothache that niggled at him, souring even the stolen moments he had with Blake. And making evenings like tonight all the more repugnant. To have to attend this damned function, to watch Blake preen with Jenna on his arm, lying to her, deceiving her… His fingers fumbled a programme, the computer spitting its displeasure at him. Lying to Jenna? Deceiving her? Or was it rather that he was leading Avon by the cock, giving him just enough to keep them both relatively happy; Avon with his love being fed, Blake with his deviant sexuality satisfied in secure secrecy? And neither one of them making that commitment, Blake because of his damned Cause and Avon because Blake wanted none of it. Wanted not one second of public knowledge of their little affaire, wanted not one second of Avon’s unrequited love demanding attention. He forced himself back to his solace, the never-ending flow of work. Blake’s bloody revolution, he thought to himself, sneering, a petty indulgence of a large hurt, you’d think he’d be able to revolutionise the bloody paperwork as well. After all, if he could overthrow an entire government, it seems only reasonable that… He
stopped in his tracks, the scales falling from his eyes as that one glaring anomaly stared back at him—the live-donor record, with its lists of organs replaced in over-indulged, effete Alpha men and women. And with sinking horror in the pit of his stomach, Avon knew exactly where—and how—those donors were being ‘recruited’. RAID, the cry echoed through his mind, with the sound of a crying infant being suffocated into silence and the inaudible cry of tears pouring down a young woman’s cheeks. RAID., the voices gibbered through his mind. Proof, he muttered to himself, you can’t believe this of someone without proof. Programme initiated by hurried hands, the computer began spewing out its indictment. All the changes Avon had overseen, all the alterations he had made, or had ordered, all of them, every last one of them, doctored, the benefits to Deltas removed with surgical precision, none of Blake’s promises fulfilled. Rather like me and that moment of truth when first I saw him again…

And there it was, the recommencement of ‘live donor volunteer programmes’, starting yesterday, the death knell blinking at him in glowing blue and black, bruising evidence of the on-going iniquities. Nothing, not a blessed thing had changed, not for the Deltas anyway. It would still be as miserable as before, as if it had been in the eternity when Avon had lived there. As the time that Vila had lived there since the Revolution. Since I let him walk out of my life, without so much as a farewell. Despite the giving of my word… If Blake has treated me shallowly, then it is, probably, no better than I deserve. He checked file after file, all of them carrying the notation, “action delayed until resources available”. In other words, let them wallow in the muck, for they’ve never known any better, for heaven forbid that an Alpha or a Beta should have to tighten his belt a notch so that Delta children have enough to eat…

And again, the memory of the Raids chilled him, taking him back to the fear and the impotent fury and the stench of the cowering mass. Vila’s family. His family, should you choose to look at it that way. The children he had taught, the wifes he had laughed with, perfecting his Delta accent. The ire began then, volcanic, a legitimate focus for the anger spawned of his illegitimate love and the bitter fury of what was being done, once more, in the name of Class. This then, would be his weapon against Blake. This, then, would be his vengeance for Blake not loving him… He began to close his console down, hurrying in his haste to confront Blake with this débâcle of a Freedom revolution. The irony of it made him smile, else he’d find treacherous tears threatening him. Just think, Vila is in love with me; and I, fool that I am, am in love with Blake. Who is in love with nothing so mundane as a mere mortal. HIS great love is the masses., his own masses, in their entirety, on their knees at his feet. Hardly surprising that one man can’t even begin to compete with so heady a feeling. After all, how could mere love ever compete with absolute power and the absolute corruption it brings? The last fail-safe was running now, and he sat there, so impatient, anxious to get at Blake and get on with it, a twisted echo of that day when he had sat here, chafing to get at Blake before, but for such a different reason. And one no less self-destructive. And then the lights dimmed, faded, came back. The computer spluttered, chiming and flickering gibberish at him. The door slid halfway open, then groaned to a halt. Air whispered softly to a close, leaving terrifying silence hemming him in. He recognised the plans he had authored in a time of desperation, remembered every move and the order in which it should happen, remembered the injustice that had helped fuel those plans. Deltas, tired of it all, ready to force the high-ups to listen. As the lights went out, suffocating him in darkness and the echoing screams of the trapped Alphas, he grinned, wolfshhead in the dark.

Vila, he thought, viciously proud of his rebellious protégé, who was wreaking revenge on a recalcitrant lover and a handful of empty promises as Avon had planned to unleash himself on Blake, it always seems to come back to Vila…

Through the corridors that were finally darker and grimmer than the Delta Warrens, Avon made his way to the hub of Blake’s HQ, knowing full well that this is where the greatest chaos would reign, and that there would be where he could be of most use, for what he wanted to do: disavow Blake, not help him. Not to mention that this was where he would be able to see Blake’s face, when Avon was the one to tell him why the lights were out and why the power was down, why the circulation was off, why the lifts didn’t work, why the food processors were pleading starvation and the taps, drought. Implications be damned—he was going to enjoy this.

There was, of course, unrestrained, total pandemonium, with Alphas running around, some of them literally in circles, going from one computer to another, trying desperately to get them back on line. The control room reminded Avon of a poem he had once loved enough to memorise: Dante’s Inferno. For this was hell, for the uncomprehending, oh-so-educated Alpha, all his toys broken and all his knowledge useless. Emergency lamps glimmered in pockets of light, doing nothing to dispel the gloom, the miasma that was beginning to settle with olfactory heaviness over the entire proceedings. Avon lounged by the doorway, until the whirlwind that was Blake surrounded by gesticulating advisers came within hailing distance.

“…want them on-line immediately. We have the emergency power grid, lock us in on that. And establish communications with the other levels, and use your feet to run you there if you have to. Drake,” this was the baboon, today in something that looked melon-ish in the faded light, “I want you to establish some kind of calm with the general population. Tell them that everything is under control, that this is purely temporary and nothing to be
concerned about, you know the kind of thing.”

“Yes, Drake,” Avon drolled from his post leaning beside the door, gracefully standing away from the doorjamb, “just feed them the usual dietetic pabulum. Lie, in other words. After all, we wouldn’t want to break a perfectly bad habit, now would we?”

Blake rounded on him, looking for all the world as if he had seen his very own, personal messiah. “Avon! Thank goodness you’re here. Look, man, I need you to do something with these computers, the damned things simply will not come on line to run everything…”

“That, my dear Blake,” he said, thoroughly enjoying every second of this, allowing his own hurt and disappointments to transmute into supercilious anger, all of it fanned by the gross unfairness of the Alpha policy for the Deltas, “would be a waste of my time. You see, the computers aren’t running a damned thing right now. The Deltas are. And the only thing you should be running, Blake, is scared. I,” he said, voice hard and blunt as a runaway train, “know exactly what is going on, and what you and your little clique of pampered pets have been doing. Or perhaps I should say, I know what you’ve not been doing. What about your promises to the Deltas, hmm? Enough food, you said. Enough water, you said. Enough medicine, you said. All those promises, as empty as your bloody mind. You’ve given them nothing but false hope and that is cruel, Blake, viciously and unnecessarily cruel. And now, if everything is going according to schedule, you will have armed and irate Deltas pouring in around him, growing louder, until even the muffled Alphas could hear it. Avon smiled, slouching a little, just a fraction, as the horde that had adopted him came running.

Almost jaunty, he wound his way to the adit, only to find that it had already been cleared, someone he didn’t know guarding a herd of Alphas in the corner.

“Oi! You!” the unshaven spectacle called, his intellect echoing down the hall behind him. “Evacuate and re-group.” he heard and then he was out of earshot, making his way towards the adit he knew Vila would be using. The adit he had planned on using himself, all that time ago. It was time, perhaps, to see if he could salvage mere love, now that he was beginning to realise its worth. Half a loaf, after all, truly is better than starving to death at the hands of a man who values appearances over substance, who valued distance, over closeness. Who valued the same things that had held such lure for Avon, before almost a year amongst the Deltas had taught him otherwise.

Abruptly, blinding him, the lights came on full force, a ragged cheer stumbling after them in welcome. Sound came back, on all those subliminal little noises that natives never notice, unless something is out of kilter with them, warning of something gone wrong. And there was an imbalance here, now, with the lights and the air and the whirl of technology all singing a happy madrigal together.

Stock still, amidst all the haste of people scurrying around him, Avon stood, head cocked, listening very carefully indeed, to the subtle nuances of a lifetime’s Dome dwelling. Yes, there was a difference, an almost visceral swell of sound, a rambunctiousness that was beginning to flow around him, growing louder, until even the muffed Alphas could hear it. Avon smiled, slouching a little, just a fraction, as the horde that had adopted him came running. First, he knew, would be the fighters, the Jaks and Sylvies and Decs and Meris of the Deltas, mowing down Alphas with the same efficient disregard as they got rid of bugs. Although, were they to follow the plan exactly, they would simply be stunning the Alphas, rounding them up, using threat, not enemy-unifying slaughter, to tip the scales. After all, they wanted real victory. They didn’t want to destroy the Alpha luxury levels. They wanted to live there. Avon thought of his mother. And smiled.

Almost jaunty, he wound his way to the adit, only to find that it had already been cleared, someone he didn’t know guarding a herd of Alphas in the corner.

“Yeh, yer seen ‘im?”

Avon thought of his mother. And smiled.

“Yeh, yer seen ‘im?”

The Deltas looked at him, then at each other, the anonymous darkness, the proof of Blake’s trust in his intellect echoing down the hall behind him. “Evacuate and regroup.” He turned and strolled through the door, one last, personal barb cloaked as a professional dagger aimed directly at Blake’s weak spot. “They’ll be looking for you, you see. Although I’m sure once they do, they’ll wonder why they bothered.”

And with that, he was gone, swallowed up by the anonymous darkness, the proof of Blake’s trust in his intellect echoing down the hall behind him. “Evacuate and regroup.” he heard and then he was out of earshot, making his way towards the adit he knew Vila would be using. The adit he had planned on using himself, all that time ago. It was time, perhaps, to see if he could salvage mere love, now that he was beginning to realise its worth. Half a loaf, after all, truly is better than starving to death at the hands of a man who values appearances over substance, who valued distance, over closeness. Who valued the same things that had held such lure for Avon, before almost a year amongst the Deltas had taught him otherwise.

Almost jaunty, he wound his way to the adit, only to find that it had already been cleared, someone he didn’t know guarding a herd of Alphas in the corner.

“Oi! You!” the unshaven spectacle called, his mate levelling her weapon. “Ge’ over ‘ere, you. Wiv the others, c’mon, c’mon, move it, move it!”

“Nah,” Avon said, slipping into the Delta with conscious thought, not the easy slide of returning Alpha-ness, but perfect at it nonetheless, “wot’d I want ter do a thing like tha’ for then, eh? You don’ know me, duz yer? I’m Avon Restal.”

The Deltas looked at him, then at each other, the woman nodding at the man, then speaking. “Yeh, recog-nise yer now I do, didn’t at first, no’ wiv yer fancy clothes an’ everythin’. I’m Wilma Fee an’ this is me wifey, Vic. We’re wiv the Dockerty lot. You lookin’ fer Vila?”

“Yeh, yer seen ‘im?”

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...
“Whiles ago. Wen’off ter take care o’ some high muckety-muck, some bloke called Blake, I think ‘e was.”

“Yeh,” Avon agreed, “‘e would be, wouldn’t ‘e?”

“Oi, Avon,” the voice called after him, so he turned to listen. “Lissen, we all appreciate the way yer was willin’ ter stay up ‘ere, away from yer hubby, jest ter ge’ us inside info, ter make sure them Alphas o’ yours was doin’ wot they ought ter be doin’. Made a difference, it did, knowin’ there was summun up ‘ere, watchin’ out fer us.”

So that was the excuse he came up with. Certainly saved my bacon as far as the Family are concerned, he thought, not even noticing that the family he referred to had nothing whatsoever to do with the elegant good-breeding to which he had been born. No doubt, though, he shall have an entirely different approach the instant he gets me alone. And it struck him then, that there was no image, this time, of being alone with one of his lovers—that particular thought boggling his brain, to see himself as image, this time, of being alone with one of his lovers—gets me alone.

And it struck him then, that there was no image, this time, of being alone with one of his lovers—that particular thought boggling his brain, to see himself as a man with not one, but two homosexual lovers, even if one of them refused to concede as much—engendered not sexual heat hot enough to fry his brain, but the resumption of responsibilities, the resumption of commitment. He remembered his most recent sight of Blake: eyes all distant, focussed on his Cause and his power and not a thought spared for Avon. He thought of Blake, at those damned dinners they had to attend, each of them with a woman on his arm, although Avon at least was honest to Cally, enjoying her company and her ever more acerbic wit. He thought of sneaking through deserted corridors, dodging the law patrols, creeping like a thief in the night, fleeing the law in love then, had proved just as stupid a thing to do as he had feared. But perhaps, simply loving, comfortable, old-slipper loving, that could be bearable. Perhaps the fireworks belonged as an occasional display, but simple loving could be a way of life. Perhaps. If he had the courage to do it. If he could bear to live as a Delta again, up here, amongst his Alphas…

With Blake ‘evacuating and regrouping’, taking Avon’s advice, for once, now that it suited Avon not at all, Vila would have no one to fight, for Blake would take his upper strata of leadership with him. With one notable exception, that is. _He_ was going home, to the place he knew Vila would eventually come. He would do what he had once found so terribly difficult, with the carrots of fireworks and freedom dangling so temptingly before him. He would go home and wait. For Vila, now that he had tasted those forbidden fruits and found them sawdust between his teeth. No, he was no fool to repeat the mistakes of the past endlessly. He would learn from these bitter mistakes. He would go home, to wait, for Vila. Yes, it does always seem to come back to him. And this time, there was no fear there, no emasculation. Just Vila, comfortable, warm Vila. Who, love being purportedly blind, might be willing to overlook a certain little infidelity…

For the first time in his memory, Thatcher didn’t open the door, even though it wasn’t his day off. Puzzled, Avon let himself in, crossing the foyer, which is when the noise hit him. That was Jak’s youngest, for only Lin could screech quite like that, surely. There couldn’t be two of her in this world, although the decibel level implied that perhaps there were actually six or seven of her. With great trepidation, honestly unwilling to believe his ears, he crept towards the parlour door. There was one minor aspect that he had conveniently forgotten about, when thinking of coming home to Vila: the entire bloody family would come home with him, too. And it sounded dreadfully as if most of them hadn’t waited for the all clear and had descended, en masse at that, into the Avon-Waylz family parlour. He sagged against the wall, remembering words spoken so long ago he had managed to completely forget them. _An’ share wiv ‘im wot we’ve got_. Old Restal’s words, and their implications, thudded into his mind. _Share and share alike. And now, that means the Avon-Waylz family home is about to be shared with the other half of my family. Which explains why ‘may you live in interesting times’ is a curse. And I think my own personal curse has just moved in: All of them…_  

He peeked round the door, more cautious than when facing a medley of mutoids. His mother was there. Both of them, if you counted his Affirmation. And there were children, everywhere, every single last one of them fingering every single last item in the room. Including the silkenness of his mother’s stockings… Avon groaned, recognising little Dev, whose real name no-one ever remembered. Dev, short for ‘deviant’, their 16 year old retarded cousin who could pass for 10 and never let anything animate get away without him making a pass at he, she it or them. And he had that look on his face. Stalking Geoff. Buttoned-down, strait-laced Geoff, who would never know what had hit him. Avon closed his eyes, seriously considering that, as discretion is the better part of valour, this might be a truly propitious moment to run away from home, his age be damned. Then he heard Vera…

“Oooh, yeh, I’m jest tickled fuckin’ pink, ter finally meet yer, no’ tha’ Avon ever said much about the rest o’ is family ter us, secretive little sod, but I don’ mind tellin’ yer,” she was saying, in that peculiar, high-pitched squeal that only Deltas seemed able—or willing—to master, one big palm popping out, cack-handed punctuation marks, to punch Lady Waylz on the upper arm with every phrase, “‘e’s a lovely boy, tha’ Avon o’ yers. Lovely, lovely lad. An’ such a catch for my Vila, never thought my boy’ud ever bring ’ome a lovely fish like your
Avon. Done a grand job wiv 'im, yer 'ave, hen, grand job.” She folded her arms, resting her huge, slumping breasts on them, pushing them upwards in her enthusiasm. “An’ it’s sech a pleasure, meetin’ yer is, meetin’ the wifey wot’s responsible fer our Avon bein’ sech a lovely boy.” She didn’t seem to notice Avon’s mother absolutely flabbergasted expression. Nor the fact that the Alpha woman’s jaw seemed dislocated, until she closed it with a snap, remembering her breeding, covering her shock with a thick patina of blank outrage. Avon knew that look, remembered it from that telling (had he been willing to listen to himself) episode with his best friend from school. There certainly was trouble brewing. And for once, his money wasn’t on his mother… He cringed in anticipation, cursing his mother’s phenomenal gift for languages. It was typical, so bloody typical that she, of all people, would understand Delta…

“Oooh, yes,” Vera was going on, unabated, “we’re so proud o’ our Avon, oh, I ‘ope yer don’t mind us callin’ him our Avon, jest thaa’ ‘e’s so much one o’ us now, wot wiv ‘im an’ Vila Affirmed together. No’ thaa’ you fancy Alphas call i’ Affirmed, does yer though? Married, is wot you lot call i’, if I don’t misremember…”

Avon groaned out loud then, the Outer Rim planets beckoning wildly.

His mother looked as if a fit of the vapours was rapidly becoming her only option. It was written all over her face: My son, my flesh and blood, married, to a DELTA? Come and meet my son the poof, and his Delta husband… What very little colour she had, drained from her face, only to flush back as a snotty-nosed 3 year old husband…

Avon looked at the little brats anywhere, can yer? Our Avon much bovver when he was just an ankle-biter then, was ‘e? Ooh, but ‘ere I am, talkin’ the ‘ind leg off a donkey,” which metaphor gained her the unbelievable: an increase in the look of outrage on Lady Waylz’ face, “an’ me no’ even askin’ yer if yer the one wot brought ‘im up, or if yer mate over there is yer wifey.”

At that point, Avon wanted the ground to open up and swallow him. Unfortunately, the only thing that opened was Vera’s mouth to allow her to swallow her other foot and then chew vigorously.

“Oooh, yeh,” she said, all misty-eyed reminiscence, “I remember the night they ’ad ter stay at my ‘ouse, cos two of Jak’s kids ’ad the pox an’ we ’ad ter keep ’em separated like —an’ innit terrible when the kids get sick, hen, jest awful, all that puke an’ shite all over the place, bu’ well, we’re mothers, ’av ter love ’em even then, don’t we—bu’ anyway, was lovely tha’ night, wiv our Avon an’ our Vila sleepin’ in our ‘ouse, not that they did much sleepin’, o’ course,” she snickered, nudging Lady Waylz once more, causing that redoubtable Dame to check to see just how dirty her blouse was getting, “them ’uffin’ an’ puffin’, like that. Sneaked a peak, I did,” she whispered, leaning in close, her breath almost making Avon’s mother faint, “an’ there they were, no’ a stitch on, yer Avon wiv his cock shoved up our Vila’s arse. Lovely sight,” she sighed, “lovely sight. Got ever such a nice bum, our Avon ‘as. You don’t mind me callin’ ‘im ‘our’ Avon, does yer?”

And this time she actually waited for an answer.
“Not at all,” Lady Waylz replied, drawing herself up, back stiff as a board, attitude just as rigid, hands busy smoothing her real linen skirt from where grubby hands had left their marks. “In fact, going by what you’ve been telling me, you just might be welcome to him. Although I seriously doubt that any son of mine could possibly live as a Delta, and certainly not to the point of marrying one.” Anything else she was going to say was shattered by the sound of an ornament meeting the floor loudly. A Dresden figurine on a real-wood floor. A genuine, pre-Atomic Dresden figurine. And one of the little animals had been pawing it…

“Dec! You pick tha’ up, yer mangy little bugger. Wotcher think yer doin’, playin’ wiv wot’s the grown-up’s, eh? Ge’ over ‘ere, so’s I can give yer a thump.” But then April was climbing up on the antique chair to reach the pretty, bright carriage clock with its spinning brass balls and that little blond boy, the one whose nose ran as perpetually as he did, was investigating one of the funny pictures. With a pen in his hand… Avon stepped in, before chaos could become entrenched even more heartily than it already was.

“April! Yeh, you,” he bellowed, “gerroff. An’ Dec, go on, yer eard yer gran, pick the fuckin’ thing up an’ keep yer bleedin’ ‘ands off. An’ tha’ goes fer the lot o’ yer’s, d’yer ‘ear me? Better fuckin’ behave yersel’s in ’ere, or yer’ll ’ave me ter answer to. This is my ’ouse yer in now, an’ I make the rules, so yer jest watch yerselves.” He made a dive across the room where Dev was getting rather too friendly with Lord Avon. “I said,” he yelled, shaking the retarded teen by the collar, his father agape with shock at the sight of what he had thought was his younger son, “keep yer fuckin’ ‘ands OFF.”

And then there was silence. Profound and utter silence. With Avon, Alpha-élite Avon, standing in the middle of the room, the echoes of his foul-mouthed Deltaism still ringing in everyone’s ears, still with a teenager dangling from one clenched hand. “Ah,” he said, not knowing where to begin, “yes, well…”

“Kerr?” his mother asked, obviously completely taken aback. After all, if her son were capable of speaking like that, then perhaps he was capable of ‘having his cock shoved up our Vila’s arse’. Meet my son the poof and his Delta husband… She was, quite simply, going to become utterly hysterical. It was, under the circumstances, the only suitable thing to do…

“Mother, I really can explain everything, it’s honestly not quite as dreadful as it all seems at present…” Avon lied, watching warily as his mother turned all sorts of interesting shades, none of it funny, not now, not with everyone staring at him and both his families just looking at him, his Alpha family because of his Deltaness, his Delta because of his alienating Alpha-ness that they had never actually seen before, not in all its glory, in a room of elegance overlaid with their commonness. It can’t get any worse than this, he thought.

And of course, with such an invitation, Fate just had to prove him wrong. Blake walked in. So, unfortunately, did Vila. The sight of them brought it all back with a vengeance, all the tangles and the pain and the agony of it ripping through Avon again with fresh force, joining the new snarl of his two families facing off for a battle royal. And they, the man he loved and the man with whom he was in love, despite his better judgement, looked ready to kill, the only question being whom they were going to murder.

But Avon, he realised with depression roosting heavily on his shoulder, seemed a very likely candidate for both of them.

Oh, fuck, he thought, mixing his Delta language with his Alpha speech, dropping Dev and drawing himself up tall and proud to face the fray, it always has to come back to both of them, doesn’t it…