

AGAINST THE WALL

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HE FELT ALMOST AS IF HE SHOULD WEAR A DISGUISE, JUST IN CASE. *In case of what*, he mocked himself, *if anyone were to see me here, then they should be as embarrassed as I*. He hid behind his drink, a huge tankard of foamy ale, bitter and sour and strong. With the silence of a big man used to treading lightly, he perused the hallways, peering into those rooms where the door lay open. The women beckoned to him and normally, he may well have been tempted by some of them, but tonight, he needed hardness, needed another man, the feel of potency, not fecundity. He wandered around, searching out the right section of the House, seeking the proof of their Galactically famous claim: *no desire left unfulfilled*.

He turned a corner and nearly choked. *Brazen little...hussy*, the thought came involuntarily, slipping past his guards of tolerance. Vila was in the public room, on the stage, with three—no, there were too many hands for that—four people, a blend of male and female, dark and light. The thief was obviously having a whale of a time. Grinning, chuckling quietly into his beer, Blake continued walking, taking in the sights, slow arousal building, kindled and fueled by the open displays of lust all around.

He rounded yet another corner, realising that he had stumbled upon the truly intimate section: the fantasy rooms. Here, people bared their dreams, not necessarily their bodies, finding in these rooms acceptance of whatever they desired, of whatever choices they made, of whatever oddities they would normally keep hidden away from the judgmental eyes of outsiders. There, a woman dressed in long black robe, a pillar of night, acted the rôle of Temple Mother, demanding the sacrifice of the first born's innocence; there, a man, in everyday street clothes, was wooed by a pretty woman in a floral frock; there, two men wrestled in Olympian contest, to win the Greek goal.

Blake walked on, embarrassed and fascinated to see these people at their most vulnerable, dreaming out loud, as it were. Once, he stopped, just for a moment, to watch a man, sitting alone, erection pulsing against his stomach, his room stark and staring white, as the solitary figure simply remained motionless, apart from the tap, tap, tapping of his cock. Blake couldn't comprehend this man's dream, the fantasy he was sharing, the insular arrogance he was display-

ing. As a viper strikes, the man turned and looked directly at Blake, hooking him with the barbs in his eyes, reeling him in, smiling in silent mockery. The smile was what freed Blake. He had seen better than that, had been played with greater skill than anything this fellow could muster. Blake walked on through the pathways of other people's dreams, sometimes feeling pity for the visions he saw, sometimes feeling only disgust at the nightmares being inflicted upon the unwary wanderer.

Eventually, he found himself in the dimmest corridor, a fragment of an open street, brought indoors to the falseness of daily night and misty anonymity. Here, none of the doorways led anywhere, mere indentations in the façade, hollows for the facelessness of casual, gratuitous sex. The sounds here were overwhelming, drowning the senses with their honesty, the veneer of polite social interaction completely discarded, baring the unvarnished truth to the world. And the smell, too, raw sexuality, tidal eddies of perfumes and colognes, danger and lust and excitement. Everywhere Blake looked, there were brief, liquid flashes of skin, hands moving, eyes flashing, teeth gleaming. Lust. All around him, unfettered, unchained by the niceties, raged unrestrained lust. He filled his lungs with it, drinking in the freedom. *This* was what he needed. Anonymous, casual, brief and impersonal, a blazing contrast to the unfulfilled complexities on board ship. Confident, swaggering a little in his assured and blatant manhood, he strode on down the street, picking and choosing, taking his time before he made his decision.

His stride faltered into questioning disbelief. *Avon? Here? Surely not*. But it was, standing in a doorway, pressed against the wall by a burly big man, hands clenched in auburn hair, mouth locked to another's. Blake stepped forward, recognising that it was absurd not to have expected to see Avon in the Sector's most famous brothel, that it was outright stupid not to have seen that this blank, pseudonymous street would be the only area he would risk finding satisfaction.

Step by slow step, Blake approached the two men, mesmerised, cock hard, chafing against his trousers. Without thought, he unzipped himself, stroking himself in perfect harmony with the movements of

Avon's pale hands on the stranger's tanned backside. The hands shoved the green trousers further out of the way, revealing the full globes of the ass, the hairy musculature of the bulky thighs. Avon kissed and kissed, eyes closed, and Blake wondered where Avon's mind was, whom that head held within, whose mouth Avon dreamed he was kissing. Coming closer, hand stroking his cock, thumb pulling fore-skin back and forth in a tender caress, Blake stopped inches from the stranger, all three of them completely engrossed in the erotic skill of Avon's luscious mouth.

Dark eyes flew open, impaling Blake with the honesty of their gaze, demanding a choice from him, defying him to have the courage. The big rebel took the final step, stopping with the tip of his cock pressed against firm buttocks. The stranger did not—could not—give up Avon's mouth for the paltry sight of the man at his back, simply reaching one hand behind himself to spread his cheeks in silent invitation, then sliding his hand forward again to stroke Avon.

Eyes still locked to Blake, Avon kneaded the man's backside, opening him up to Blake, offering the closest thing to sex between the two of them that either could ever hope to accept. This was uncomplicated, unacknowledged. Tomorrow, on the flight deck, Avon would fight with him just as viciously, would throw hostility at him to mask the terrifying possibility for love they both saw: a love that they both tacitly agreed would be suicidal, or murderous, if allowed to bind them, if allowed to grow unchecked. There was too much danger in the depths and heat of the emotion that crackled and stormed between them, too much fear triggered by the implicit dependence with which they would both be afflicted. To each, this love that they both tried so desperately to abort was weakness, sentimentality, a sure road to death. But for now, they could have sex, of a kind, and love, if one were willing to face it.

Eyes bright and piercing, Avon stared at Blake, pulling him forward, pushing him away. Blake reached into his pocket, pulling out the lubricant the management dispensed with such unobtrusive practicality. The easeful liquid slipped inside the stranger, borne on a careful finger. Already hard, more than ready, Blake pressed his erection home, entering the welcome heat, penetrating Avon without so much as touching him. The tech groaned, feeling the stranger surge up against him, lifted onto his toes by Blake's deep thrust. Every time the rebel moved his hips, swirling and plunging, fulfilling and denying, the stranger's cock rubbed against Avon's, snub heads bumping with such fine, devastating pleasure. Blake

took the stranger, the go-between, his surrogate for the sweetness and danger of having Avon. Still staring into Avon's eyes, he thrust, lifting the stranger off his feet, breaking the kiss finally, leaving Avon gaping and panting.

Inexorably, Blake was drawn to Avon, by the dark eyes, by the dark depths of the man. Mesmerised, hypnotised, he brought them together, a toe testing the waters of possibilities between them. Avon's sigh filled Blake's mouth, touching him to the heart, his tongue thrusting into Blake as Blake himself thrust into the warm body shielding them, one from the other. Vast doors flew open, caverns of feelings swallowing them, devouring them in the power of their passion. Avon melted into Blake, Blake flowed into him, bodies loving and thrusting and heating, furnaces ready to consume them, to burn their individualities into ashes, to commingle them into a single interdependent entity.

Groaning, Blake felt orgasm approaching, in himself, in Avon, in the living, supple bridge across the chasm of fear that separated them, a bridge that was the only way for them to ever cross the aching, empty space. Tongue against Avon's, breathing for them both, agonisingly wonderful orgasm shook Blake, taking the strength from his legs and from his sanity's recognition that this—here and now—was all he could ever have with his dark angel. Avon quivered in his arms, the stranger's spasming muscles as warm as the tech's, as sweaty, as beloved, in this fragile, rare moment.

As feelings subsided, as chill reality froze Blake's dreams, as the onrushing coldness placed his hopes in suspended animation, the two of them pulled apart, lips reluctant, minds unwillingly acknowledging the true state of affairs for them. Watching Blake, Avon kissed the stranger with all the display of love he could dare, touching the stranger's hair as Blake turned the man, in turn gifting the interpreter with all the deep adoration he wished and feared giving to Avon.

Still looking at the possibilities being murdered before they could even try to succeed, Avon and Blake parted from the stranger, and, hence, each other, each returning to his own protective armour, be it halo or cynicism. They straightened their clothing, disguising their moment of truth, completing the illusion—the *delusion*—of competition, and nothing more, between them. Without a backward glance, in an impressive display of abject cowardice, they each turned to face the opposite direction, naturally, and walked away, quite literally turning their backs on the past, the present and most assuredly, the future.