Perhaps, if the Federation had included hunger suppression in their reconditioning procedures, the incident would never have begun. Blake was a big man—not the size of that gentle giant Gan—but large boned and far from slender. It was not uncommon that he should leave the flight deck during the middle of a quiet watch to wander down to the galley in search of sustenance. As he began the first of a week of midwatches, he decided that perhaps it might make sense to stockpile a few edibles for snacking now and delay the inevitable tea break until those weary hours when the ship’s night drew close to morning.

The Liberator’s corridors were still and silent as he trod quietly through them. The other crewmembers were probably all in bed or at least in their cabins, he thought. A muffled noise coming from the branch corridor to his right shattered that illusion. The complete unexpectedness of the sound startled him and he felt that instantaneous surge of adrenalin the body unleashes in self-protection. He stopped, looking to see the source of the noise. The corridor lighting was dim. At the beginning of their stay aboard ship they had all decided it would be best to replicate planetary conditions as much as possible. Cally agreed when she joined them shortly afterwards. She also insisted that for their mental and physical well-being they adhere to a gradually rotating watch schedule. “No one will be forced to always stand the same watch and it will alleviate some of the boredom that is inevitable with shipboard life.” Even Avon, who had been known to disagree merely to see Blake’s reaction, voiced no dissent.

The branch corridor was very short. At its end, a single door led into the Liberator’s generous exercise and recreational facilities. Blake could see that the door stood open now, with two figures close together outlined in the frame. He recognized Vila’s back and the clothing he wore, but whoever stood in front of the master thief, embracing him, was less visible. Not Jenna surely—his mind refused to conjure up that pairing. Nor was it Cally, for the shape was all wrong. Then who? Blake peered a little harder, not daring to move, to step forward, but with a curious desire to know who was kissing Vila.

Whoever it was seemed aware of Blake’s presence. The kiss ended, and as arms came up to encircle Vila, a dark head moved slightly sideways: Avon looked directly at him. Blake gasped faintly. If he’d been unable to move before, now he was firmly rooted in position. He could neither bend a leg to take a step away nor could he turn his head nor close his eyes. He stared at Avon and the comptech stared fixedly back. Even in that shadowy space, Blake could sense a silent struggle between them, a struggle he knew Avon would win. The man seemed incapable of being embarrassed, least of all by Blake. Finally Avon, confident of his small victory, moved his head back towards Vila. The rebel leader watched, mesmerized, as Avon slid his hands down to grab Vila’s ass and pull it firmly forward against his own groin.

A taunting gesture of contempt. Blake belatedly felt himself flushing deeply and then, suddenly, released from his paralysis. He started off again, heading for the galley, but his ears picked up Avon’s low voice murmuring, “Go in and wait for me, Vila. I shall return in a minute with supplies.”

“Do you always prowl the corridors during your late night watches?”

Blake looked up from the sandwich ingredients before him and sighed. “It wasn’t intentional, Avon, and well you know it.” He had hoped the matter closed.

“Yes, well…perhaps I do.” Avon’s face registered a conflicting set of emotions, which Blake interpreted as the comptech’s usual arrogance and air of superiority, underlain by incipient uncertainty and the faintest whiff of fear. A potent and deadly combination, Blake thought. There was tension enough on board the Liberator and his own relationship with Avon was a jagged, shifting thing, rather unnerving. Neither one of them needed the further aggravation or complications this untimely conversation might bring. He started to speak, to placate the leather clad Alpha before the situation worsened.

“Look here, Avon, I don’t much care what you and Vila get up to on your off-duty hours provided it doesn’t affect your performance during a mission.

“How very enlightened of you, oh Great Leader, but I wasn’t asking for your permission.”

“Oh weren’t you now? Then why follow me down
“Is was on my way here when I was…interrupted.”

“So I had noticed,” Blake said irritably. Silently, he cursed himself. Avon always seemed to win the arguments—even when he didn’t.

“That surprises me.”

“What does?”

“That you would…notice. You never seem to show any personal interest in anyone, Blake. Many details of shipboard life escape your comprehension completely. For a charismatic leader who engenders such loyalty among his followers, you are exceedingly dense. Perhaps it is a congenital defect: you have a natural ability to ignore the psychology of the individuals around you in favour of the undefined group. However much you think you understand the masses with your ideas of ‘good for the whole,’ you are completely ignorant.

Blake bristled. “I wasn’t aware there was any problem.”

“Of course you weren’t. You’re blind, Blake. Blind to anything but the ideals you’ve spun into a protective cocoon. You refuse to see anything that does not have a direct bearing on your precious Cause. The most blatant behaviour does not affect you. Let us take Jenna as a simple example, shall we? The woman has been throwing herself at you for months and you’ve never even noticed. Think about it, Blake. Outside of the Cause, you have no passions…no desires…no appetite…” The flow of accusations died slowly on Avon’s lips. He stared at Blake, his eyes narrowing, face taking on the cold mechanical mask it wore whenever he gave full measure of thought to an interesting problem. “It’s as though the mindwipe stripped you of those abilities… Tell me, Blake, when was the last time you made love to someone?”

Blake felt the blood rushing to his face for the second time in half an hour, Avon the root cause in both instances. His instinctive, immediate response was to defend himself, to cut Avon off before the conversation got any worse, but the question had touched something deep inside him, sending out waves of uncertainty and scrambling his ability to think. He finally managed a less-than-thundering retort.

“That’s a very personal question, Avon. What right do you have to ask it and why should I bother to give you an answer? And even if I…”

“Oh, do stop spluttering, Blake,” Avon cut in. “You don’t want to answer because you can’t remember. Which is exactly my point. You have been mindwiped and in the short time since, you have experienced no sexual desires, had no sexual experiences. I would venture to say that you haven’t even pleased yourself and no,” he interjected, cutting off Blake’s protestations, “I’m not asking that question. I already know the answer,” he finished smugly.

“All right, Avon,” Blake said in resignation, conceding the battle to Avon. He had neither energy nor will enough to continue fighting, and even if he had, it was entirely unclear what winning would mean. “I admit defeat. You may cease your nettling and return to your rendezvous, victory in hand. Leave me to my repast and my midwatch.” He picked up a knife and began slicing meat for his sandwich, turning his attention to the details of food preparation, wishing foolishly that Avon would simply leave.

Avon, of course, ignored the dismissal. “Oh no, Blake, no. I will not allow you to dismiss me like that.” He cautiously began circling Blake, left arm crooked at the elbow, hand held in a delicate curve before his chest. “This has been a most…enlightening conversation. Intriguing facts have been revealed and I find myself…fascinated by them.” He paused, halfway round in his journey, to watch as Blake began assembling the pieces of the sandwich.

“Well now,” Avon smirked, “I’m glad we’re in agreement. I shall be able to concentrate my efforts on breaking the conditioning left from the mindwipe.”

“You’ll what?” Blake turned to stare, his sandwich left unfinished. There was in Avon’s face the persistence of the hound on the scent of his quarry, determined to reach the end, not to be shaken from his objective.

“Oh, I feel certain I can unleash your libido, Blake. Without further discussion, I can bring you to my bed within a week’s time.”

“Can you now?”

The left arm broke from its statue’s pose, fingers extending until their tips grazed ever so lightly
against Blake’s cheek. “Of course I can. I always get what I want, Blake.”

“Do you, Avon? Do you really?” His voice was low, hard, cold, but Avon’s brand burned hotly on his face.

He had intended to spend his watch hours sifting through information and reports, planning strategy and deciding how best to foment revolution. It was, after all, his task, his duty as a leader in the great Cause, and, he conceded to himself, fighting the Federation brought some feeling of self-worth and respect, some emotional stability for when he thought back to the past and found only blankness and uncertain memory. Avon accused him of living his life within a narrow focus, of being so totally manipulated and remade by the Federation, that he was now an incomplete human being, lacking in vision and passion. Could that be true? What of the deep anger buried in his core, the anger he channelled so carefully, polishing its roughness like a gemstone, only letting its various facets be seen as good and righteous qualities? He wanted choice and freedom for all. He hated the Federation. Were not those passions and desires? Avon was merely speculating without facts. Or was he? Had the mind wipe destroyed bits and pieces of his soul?

A flashing light at his console, demanding attention and response, broke through his thoughts. He sighed, dismissing the fruitless meanderings of his mind. It was all such unproductive twaddle with no bearing on anything important.

And yet… Without volition he raised his hand to brush his cheek, dawning realization of his actions reigniting the burning touch of Avon’s fingertips.

A thing unknown, undreamt of is not missed, but an idea once thought, once spoken of, cannot be forgotten. Or so it seemed to Blake. The seed Avon had planted took root in his mind, surfacing every time he was in the tech’s presence. And that occurred with increasing frequency. He could hardly leave the flight deck every time Avon appeared and even withdrawing to the rest room or his own quarters offered no respite. Avon sought him out, posing his usual questions, needling Blake’s decisions, mocking his choices, or—contrary to their accepted behavioural norms—asking Blake’s opinions, agreeing with him, even offering support. This latter action was often accompanied by a quick pat to the shoulder or a hand to Blake’s forearm.

Blake could not shake his shadow. Avon had set himself an intriguing goal and to this end, he waged a silent but persistent seduction. His public behaviour seemed unchanged, his caustic, provoking comments hurled in unvarying proportions at all crewmembers, his duties carried out with efficiency and attention. Yet on the flight deck, when Blake would glance over to him, he would see Avon drawing the fingers of one hand upwards along his inner thigh, or skimming the tip of his tongue over his upper lip.

To Blake’s dismay and Avon’s delight—for Blake was certain that Avon was keenly observing his every action and reaction—these movements, so minimally erotic had anyone else done them, Avon’s little gestures made Blake’s body stir, reawakening it from the latency of the mindwipe. Blake would find himself blushing, when Avon would smile at him in that particular manner, or worse, would feel his body warm and tingle at the sight of the pink tongue tracing full lips. Blake had no doubt whatsoever that Avon knew precisely where his mind wandered, after watching those fingers wander up his thigh.

Four days after the late night kitchen conversation, Gan arrived early in the morning to take the watch from Blake. They entered into an ordinary conversation, Gan asking the expected questions and Blake updating him on the mundane minutiae of the night just past.

Clear, precise footsteps sounded at the flight deck entrance. Avon. Blake didn’t turn to look. Still, his body responded with an uncontrolled, undesired, violent shivering as the footsteps came to stop directly behind him, no greeting given. Quickly, Avon reached out a hand and caressed Blake downwards from the base of his spine. His fingers dug through the layers of cloth and into the crack, pushing against flesh that was suddenly more responsive, more sensitive than Blake had ever imagined. Just as quickly, the fingers withdrew and Avon moved on to seat himself on one of the flight deck’s leather couches.

He gave a mocking grin to Blake, daring the suddenly flushed figure to say anything. Blake struggled with himself; he was desperate not to show the physical reaction he could not control. Thank the stars Gan was oblivious to the interchange, engrossed as he was in his scanning and several seconds passed before he looked up from his console to ask something more, giving Blake much-needed time to control himself.

The next time it happened, Blake was alone in the
rest room, almost dead with a fatigue of his own making—he’d stayed awake through most of his sleep period in an effort to catch up on a sudden flurry of incoming reports. He sat balling his fists against his eyes, hard copy printouts scattered across the table. The tea in his cup had long gone cold. He’d taken a few sips at first, then forgotten it with the distraction of work.

“Ruin your health for the Cause, Blake?” Blake started at the sound of Avon’s voice. He must be tired; this time he hadn’t heard the man’s approach at all.

“There’s a lot of planning to be done, Avon, and it requires a human mind to do it. Orac cannot make these sorts of decisions.”

“Your exhausted brain cannot make those decisions, either. In your present condition, you are more likely than usual to decide the wrong thing.” The voice moved to just inches away from Blake’s ear. “I will not,” it whispered, “allow you to risk my life because you refuse to get some sleep. We are not in a crisis situation.” Hands rose to Blake’s temples, pressing and massaging against the dull ache within. Blake sighed. Avon’s touch seemed to bring home his weariness, his lack of sleep. He found his eyes drifting shut, his head lolling backwards and he thought how paradoxical it was that heat and warmth flowed from Avon’s fingers, when it seemed the man possessed the coolest, iciest core of any living being. The warmth shifted as the magic fingers plunged up into his hair, gently pulling the tight curls and making small circles against his scalp, banishing the pain and exhaustion. It felt absolutely wonderful; where had Avon learned his technique? Then in a tactical move, the fingers disappeared. No—it wasn’t Avon’s hand on his ear; it was the comptech’s mouth, his teeth and lips nuzzling and nibbling provocatively. Very provocatively. The Rebel Leader found his body beginning to respond. A buzz of sensation settled in his groin, blood quickly rushing there to stiffen and engorge his organ. Involuntarily he sucked in his breath, then bit his lip, while cursing himself that this gesture would draw Avon’s attention. Cautiously, he opened his eyes, completely aware his erection was very visible and very evident. Avon’s mouth had fled its perch on Blake’s ear. The tech stood slightly to the side gaz-
little to-do last week had set the comptech onto him. The man had been all over him all week, and Blake found himself almost frightened by the possible results of another encounter. This time, perhaps, it would not end as before, with mere words, but rather, with actions, irrevocably changing him.

It was then that he came to a full stop, his wandering, out-of-kilter mind finally recognizing where it had directed his feet. Around one more corner and he would almost be at the recreation room door. He told himself to leave, to leave Avon’s trap unsprung. But his body, his feet and hands were no longer listening to any rational part of his mind. He was simply compelled to walk through that door and when he did, Avon would win again.

In the space of a deep breath he was through the opening, all nagging doubts, all warnings of conscience shed like water sheeting off an emerging swimmer. He stood on the other side of the threshold, pressing the flat of his hands against the hard burnished metal of the door, as if the ship’s innate coldness could seep through and cool the internal heat he felt building within. The room was softly illuminated; the usual harshness of the standard lights had been banished and in its place was the yellow glow of—candles? Yes, real, wax candles, perhaps a dozen or so, were burning in several groupings along the deck floor and on several low benches. For a moment Blake gazed at their flickering light, a soft warmth which concentrated on the spa and left dark edges and height of the room. But his eyes were quickly drawn to the centre of the light, to the stage and players on it.

Vila, submerged in the spa water with elbows resting along the sides, smiled dreamily—drunkenly—up at him. Within Vila’s reach was a half empty bottle of something decidedly decadent and decidedly not soma, and next to it stood three glasses, two used, the third pristine. Blake started at the physical evidence of his expected arrival. Avon, of course. Avon had invited him and Avon knew he would come. With this thought Blake felt himself flushing deeply, his heat building again. He closed his eyes to banish it, to wish himself away from here and away from Avon. But his wish went unfulfilled. Or perhaps it was simply that he didn’t really wish it. When he opened his eyes the subject of all his perturbations glided out of the darkness and into his vision. Avon, gloriously naked with cock thickened and fully erect, smiled his own silent seductive smile of invitation to Blake and began the final act of his campaign. He drew one hand slowly across his own chest stopping at each nipple to fondle it with his thumb. His other hand picked up a tube from one of the benches and squeezed out lubricant which he carefully and sensuously applied to his aroused member. Blake, mesmerized by the motions, felt himself begin to sway. His own groin was aflame now, his cock stiffening and filling, responding to each touch, each caress he could see the comptech making. His knees began to buckle and slowly he sank to the floor. Avon came up to him and knelt down, undoing the sash of Blake’s dressing gown, then pushed the garment down the big rebel’s shoulders till gravity took hold. Blake stared at the velvet brown eyes just inches away. Avon had instilled such need in him—such hunger, such unyielding desire—he trembled in the nearness of those eyes, of that muscled body. He longed for a touch, something to quiet his building passion, but when Avon placed his index and middle fingers on Blake’s sternum there was no respite, only greater hunger and a more desperate need. The fingers drifted downwards skimming lightly over hair and skin until they came to rest at the top of Blake’s cock. The rest of the hand came round and enclosed it. Blake moaned and threw his head back. He could feel his shaft pulsing against the palm of Avon’s hand. He ached to move against that hand and began to thrust gently into it. A sensation of coolness joined the fingers that gripped him. Vaguely, he realized the tech was applying lubricant, then the fingers and hand withdrew. Blake managed to lift his head and once more Avon smiled his knowing, sensuous smile, while his eyes dared Blake to follow.

The rebel leader had no choice. The same force which had brought him here compelled him to rise unsteadily and cross to where Avon stood knee-deep in the water. Vila was still submerged within the pool, but the thief had moved onto his back so that only one elbow hung over the side and his free hand could work his own stiff rod. His face retained its dreamy quality, although now there was anticipation crowding it. Vila looked from Blake back to Avon then rolled over to his original position, sighing happily.

He had entered a strange erotic dream. The wildly arousing tableau before him was not real. Avon moved forward to part Vila’s cheeks, Blake feeling each and every movement. He throbbed with Avon’s heat and felt as the tightness at the tip of Avon’s cockhead slowly yielded to a moist all-encompassing warmth. There was a cry when Avon slowly pushed forward—his voice, Avon’s Vila’s? Perhaps
all three, for Blake couldn’t tell, was only certain that he was drowning in sensation, in an ever-expanding pull of lust that made him move forward into the water to stand behind, Avon who now lay quietly across Vila’s back, head turned sideways, waiting. Waiting for himself, Blake realized. The desire was so strong. It pulsed and pounded against him, begging, demanding fulfillment. He raised both hands to touch the smoothness of Avon’s shoulders and in the instant of that connection, the lust and need and desire surged into him with the force of a wave breaking heavily against the shore. He cried aloud again; the pleasure was so sweet, and in one swift motion, raked his hands down Avon’s back to find the opening and plunged himself fully and completely into Avon.

The Alpha tech thrust back suddenly aggressive against him like a gape-jawed barracuda flashing onto its prey, then just as quickly pulled away, pressing deeply into Vila, arm encircling the Delta to milk his swollen organ. The rhythm set, they rocked smoothly against each other, Avon pistoning back and forth, Vila and Blake pushing steadily against the glorious onslaught. Intense sensation began to overwhelm Blake. He felt himself centred on his cock, a steel rod being slowly heated at the forge and connecting straight through Avon into Vila. The tech ground against him insistently, urging him onwards. He lifted his hands to Avon’s waist, securing it against his frantic thrustings, his insistent pounding...pounding...pounding. He teetered at the edge of a speeding, swirling whirlpool. The waters of the spa began to churn with the motion, slapping noisily against his ass and flanks, sloshing over Avon and Vila, creating a discordant rhythm apart from the thrusting. Harder and harder he thrust, feeling himself grow impossibly hot. The fire in his cock glowed red-hot, white-hot and he slammed one last time against Avon, melting in the forge, spewing white-hot cum. His exultant cry was joined immediately by Avon’s and Vila’s voices as they, too, melted in the flames.

Some minutes later Blake regained his senses. He had slipped from Avon down into the spa, whose waters now seemed cooling, soothing.

“What do you find so amusing, Blake?”

Blake opened his eyes and took the now full third glass Vila held out to him. He turned to Avon, content and utterly incapable of being provoked by anything the comptech might say. “I was thinking how you accomplished precisely what you said you would. You will remember, of course, that you accused me of having no appetite or hunger. But appetite, my dear Avon, is the reason I am here. I got hungry and headed off to the galley for a bedtime snack.”

“I should think you’ve had it now,” Vila snickered. Avon indulged the thief with a look of contented tolerance that precluded a sharp retort.

“You still haven’t answered my question, Blake”

“Yes, well…I seem to have partaken of one item I hadn’t considered. I thought about cocoa, scones and jam, or even some of Vila’s leftover trifle. What never came to mind was to have a sandwich.”

“A sandwich! Oohh, that’s rich that is. I suppose that makes you the ‘meat’ in middle, Avon,” giggled Vila who had sunk down into the pool until his ears just barely cleared the waterline. “For a piece of meat, you’re very filling.”

“Oh, I quite agree with Vila, Avon. That was by far the best midnight snack I’ve ever had. I have only one question.”

“And what might that be?”

“What do you intend to serve for breakfast?”

Avon flashed a smile of complete satisfaction. “Well now,” he said as he began to follow Vila’s lead and sink below the waterline, “I was rather hoping you’d want some more meat. And that would make it all worthwhile.”