

# I TRUST AND TRUTH

We begin *Oblaquer* with some wonderful tales of relationships, each one threaded with typical *Blake's* 7 themes of trust and truth.

## THE TRUTH WILL OUT M. Fae Glasgow

"BLAKE," AVON CALLED THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR. "Blake!" His increased impatience and volume both went unacknowledged. The comptech decided to take a leaf out of Vila's book and simply barge in.

Blake sat, disconsolate, at his desk, oblivious to his surroundings. His cabin was cluttered, bed unmade, clothes and personal things scattered in shadow-laden mounds. He was marooned in the pool of light cast by the desk lamp, absently turning one of Orac's printout tapes over and over in his hands.

Avon sighed in irritation and strode over to his distracted, would-be leader. He put his hand on a tense shoulder, bringing Blake out of his reverie.

"Yes, Avon? What is it?" The voice was tired, scratchy with emotions coiled inside.

"I merely came to give you Orac's key." When Blake showed no reaction, he went on. "You did ask me to, immediately I was finished, don't you remember? Or has the memory wipe spread again?"

Blake glowered at him, snapped into anger by the—almost—teasing comment. "I have had *enough* of your snide remarks about my memory! D'you think it's funny that most of my life's been stolen from me?" he exploded. "Get off my back, Avon. I have quite sufficient unpleasantness to deal with, without adding you to my list."

Avon stepped back, discomfited and rather guilty. He considered it for a moment, then said the words anyway. "I'm sorry. I didn't intend to upset you. At least, not this time."

The rare, welcome olive branch swept Blake's volatile temper away as precipitously as it had risen. He smiled up at Avon. "No, no, it's all right. I'm the one who should be apologising. I'm just in high dudgeon, that's all, and you got it."

"Right between the eyes, at that. Well, anyway,

here's Orac's key." He proffered the small plastic rectangle and Blake reached out slowly, a question warring on his face. As he took the key, his fingers lingered on Avon's, far longer than was discreet. He looked up into dark brown eyes, his own full of vulnerable loss. "Avon...can you imagine what it's like to forget everything? I know where I lived, because it's in the files, but I couldn't tell you what colour my bedroom was. I know the names and faces of the rebels with whom I associated, because they're in the selfsame files. But I don't remember the *people*." He juggled Orac's key with the file disk in his hands. "I don't know where I went after work, whom I would to see. Who I had tea-breaks with, what I was interested in—apart from the Rebellion, of course. That's incredibly well documented in this damned thing." He hurled the disk against the wall. Avon stared at him, outwardly impassive, eyes busy cataloguing Blake's every breath. "You said, today, in the teleport, that we worked on the same project. Did you ever meet me then? Can you tell me anything more personal?" His eyes begged Avon, all the sparkling light fled from them, driven, not by Avon's worst enemies—memories—but by their absence. "Or was I so obsessed, so shallow a man, that, apart from the Rebellion, there was no room left over; that there wasn't enough of *me*?"

The tech stared at him thoughtfully for a long, long time, questions of his own warring across his face. He looked off into a lifetime ago and made his decision. A whimsical little smile touched his lips, melancholy touched his eyes. "Well now, all you had to do, was ask." Under Blake's silent gaze, he locked the door and sat on the crumpled bed, idly picking up the pillow and plumping it.

"Avon—" Blake stopped, fiddled with Orac's key, placed it on the desk. "Well," a smile skimmed

weakly over his face like mist in the morning, “I shall ask, then. Did you know me? Before?”

Restless unease made Avon get up to wander around the untidy room, picking things up at random, replacing them neatly. He weighed his words, trying for the right ones...or if not them, then the least wrong ones. “I...was the main researcher in our section, you were the chief applied engineer. I would come up with what you called “harebrained ideas” and you would, as I put it, stupidly refuse to see possibilities and find ways to build relatively simple equipment.”

“In other words, you did know me and we got on as well then as we do now.”

Avon smiled bleakly. “Not exactly, no. Despite our professional disputes, we actually—absurd though it now seems—struck up quite a friendship. Naturally, we never let it show at the lab—the stench of favouritism, and all that—but, I have to concede, we were...friends.”

“If we never showed it at the lab, then how could we have had a friendship?”

“Oh, Blake, you really are dense, aren’t you?” the tech’s voice bubbled with amusement, but he sobered immediately. “You always were. You could be incredibly astute, then, just as I would begin to think there might be hope for you yet, you’d come out with something as stupid as that.”

“Then,” the rebel was becoming annoyed again, “pray enlighten me. Put me out of my misery. It is, after all, *my* life we’re talking about here.”

Avon stopped with his back to Blake and then, as he spoke, he slowly walked over to sit on the bed once more. “We shared a lot of interests: the same kind of music, art, books, even martial arts. We often spent time at each other’s flats, or perhaps taking a trip somewhere—anywhere to alleviate the interminable boredom of Blytee.”

“Go on...” Memories fluttered and died, still atrophied by the mindwipe, asphyxiated by the conditioning. Yet, there was something struggling for birth. If nothing else, at least now he knew there were still memories there...

“You used to talk even more than you do now. You’d go on and on about everything under the sun...except the Rebel movement. You never mentioned it to me, never discussed politics with me at all. Your favourite topic of conversation was...your lover.”

Blake was suddenly on his knees at Avon’s feet, hands grasping Avon’s cool ones tightly, hope flar-

ing undimmed and unrestrained in his bright eyes. “Tell me about her, Avon. Tell me *everything!*”

Avon squirmed uncomfortably, extricating his hands, looking everywhere—anywhere—but at Blake. “Well now,” he finally said, a blush colouring his cheeks, “you’re jumping to conclusions again. I’ll simply tell you what you told me, all those years ago, shall I?” He rushed on, leaving Blake no room for answers or questions. “You claimed that your lover was a ‘pearl beyond price’, a ‘joy and delight forever’, ‘wondrously talented’ in bed... and that he was your ‘sharp-tongued love’. And...” he continued, ignoring Blake’s startled gasp, “that you’d never leave him.”

“Him? *Him?*” Blake sat back on his heels, dumbfounded, until growing knowledge dawned with unerring certainty. “No, not him. *You*. I’m right, aren’t I, Avon?”

The tech looked at him dubiously, dusting his palms together. “Yes...” he said, hesitantly. He watched Blake, unadmitted hope mingled with fear, all triggered by the same thought: Blake might want them to get back together, to perhaps even live together as they had so often discussed...

Thoughtfully, Blake stared at Avon, for long, long moments. Then, he spoke. “You bastard. You absolute, unmitigated *bastard*.” His voice rose, anger boiling from him. “How could you do this to me? Knowing what you did, knowing whatever it was that we had between us, and you were too fucking selfish to tell me? What kind of a man are you?”

Startled by the furious vehemence, for once in his life, Kerr Avon found himself at a complete loss for words. Blake barrelled on into him, words knocking him flying, bruising his spirit. “What’s your excuse? Afraid I might demand a commitment? Afraid I might actually *want* something from you? Avon, you left me in total ignorance, floundering around trying to put some semblance of a life together, and you just sat there, watching me.” Blake shook his head in disgust. “Jenna’s right. You are a cold, vicious sod. And if you’re an example of the kind of person I used to get involved with, then perhaps the Federation did me a favour wiping you from my mind.”

“Now that is completely uncalled for. Yes, I knew details of your past, but what did you expect me to do? Come up to you on the *London* and say, by the way, I know you don’t remember me, but once upon a time, we were lovers and swore undying devotion to each other?”

“If you were too much of a coward to tell me about

that, then what about all the other things you must know about me, things that any co-worker could tell me?"

"Because I knew precisely what would happen, Blake. You would ask me about your personal life and then immediately about romantic liaisons, not satisfied until I had told you everything."

"Running from responsibilities again, are we, Avon? You *owed* it to me, to tell me about the past. To help me understand who the hell I am."

"Well now, there's something I could never do. I never understood you, Blake, neither then nor now. You have always been such a contradiction, so very noble, but just as one thinks you are different from the rest of the base human race, your callous manipulation jumps up and slaps one on the face."

"It is not I who is manipulating this, Avon, nor I who is being callous here, so..."

"Not callous? You? You're suffering from delusions of grandeur again, Blake."

"Oh, hark at the man. He's kept my past secret from me, watching me, laughing up his sleeve at the poor, ignorant fool. How you must hate me, to do what you've done."

Avon stared at Blake, his eyes as hard and sharp as slate. "Hate you, Blake? Oh, how I've tried, how I've tried."

"So, you still love me then?"

"I said no such thing."

"No, but then, you didn't deny it, either."

"Then I shall deny it now, if it'll keep you happy."

"Actually, it would. I'm not certain that I would want love from a man like you."

"No, you just want my gun and my computer skills and my blood spilled for the sake of your damned Cause. You have no idea, Blake, how much I do hate your ideals, your delusions, the false pap you feed the others."

"That, Avon, is simply because anything good or honourable is beyond your feeble, pathetic shallowness."

Avon shook his head in pained disbelief. "You really haven't changed at all, have you? Still a vicious bitch when we fight."

"Well, I'm glad that even then I had enough good taste left to row with you."

"Oh, shut up. I've had more than my fill of this useless fiasco. I knew it would only lead to a complete *débauche*, should I tell you. Well, now you know, now I've done the decent and honourable thing—and in case you didn't recognise it, yes, that was sar-

casim—I will leave. Definitely this room and probably your damned Revolution."

"Avon."

The voice stopped him, making him curious at the abrupt change in tone. "This isn't at all like you. To let me say the things I did, without flailing me for it, without offering some kind of reason, no matter how backhanded. Why, Avon?"

Avon's voice was strangled with weariness and lonely loss. "It doesn't matter, Blake. Unfortunately, it never really did."

Blake sat for hours, simply staring at the blank door through which Avon had walked. More even, than the vitriolic words, more than the revelations of his past, the thing that stayed with Blake was the weight of depression bowing Avon's square shoulders. He found himself wondering at the cause, puzzled by the implication of continued caring. Eventually, he lumbered to his feet and walked slowly to Avon's room. Unsurprisingly, the tech wasn't even close to sleep. Surprisingly, he did open the door to Blake's quiet request.

"What is it?" he asked, eyes circled with weariness. "I thought we had both said more than enough."

"Yes, we did, didn't we? I've been," Blake paused, fiddling with the tapes on Avon's shelf, "well, sort of remembering. Odd images, fragments, pictures, that kind of thing."

"How very wonderful."

"Enough, Avon! As I was saying, I've been remembering. Feelings, too, Avon. And sensations. I've been replaying a night in my mind, a time when we made love. It was...quite remarkable between us, wasn't it?"

Avon slumped onto the bed, pulling a pillow over his face, muffling his answer. "That, it would seem, was the best thing between us."

"Nothing else, Avon? None of the long afternoons, sitting by the fire, reading books to one another? None of the challenging debates? None of the shared dreams?"

"You have been remembering, haven't you?"

"You haven't answered my questions."

"No, I haven't, have I?"

"Well?"

"As Orac is so fond of saying, well is not a question."

"Was the sex truly the only good thing about our relationship, in your eyes, anyway?"

Avon stayed safely hidden behind his pillow, an-

gry with himself for his abject cowardice, but not yet so angry that he was willing to show himself—to expose himself to the oh-so-skillful manipulations he remembered far too well. “To be honest...yes. Oh, we deluded ourselves that there was more, but, well, my only defence is that I was younger then, and foolish.”

“Why are you so convinced that the sex was all that was good in our relationship “

Avon jackknifed upright, hurling the pillow at Blake’s head. With burning, deadly bitterness, he whispered, “Because it was all our relationship was, you stupid... Oh, why bother? Just get out, Blake. Leave.”

“No, Avon, not until I have some answers. This is my *life* we’re talking about here and...”

“It’s my fucking life, too! And it is *not* open to discussion. Now shut up and get out!”

Blake was taken aback—despite their many, many arguments, despite the vitriol they so often flung in each others’ faces, he had never heard Avon swear, not even a ‘bloody’. For a moment, he cast aside his own concerns, really and truly looking at Avon, seeing him clearly, paying him his full attention. “There has to be a reason for you to be so certain that we had nothing but sex to hold us together. I honestly don’t remember, Avon. Tell me...”

Avon balanced himself on the edge of his bed, shoulders slumped, head bent, gaze averted. “Surely, it’s patently clear? Despite our fond declarations of love, whispered secretly so that no one knew our terrible secret, of course, regardless of the...warmth of the time we spent together, look at what happened. You left me, without so much as a good-bye...”

“That’s unfair, Avon! They *arrested* me.”

Hollow, haunted eyes stared up at him. “But I didn’t know that. I spent days, weeks, searching for you, unable to eat or sleep, worried to distraction what had happened to you. Frightened for you, terrified that you had been hurt or killed and I wasn’t there for you....Then, I found out that you had been picked up by the Security Unit for treason. Do you care to know *how* I found out, Blake? I was held for ‘questioning’, tortured and beaten, for information on my ‘known associate’. That was when I discovered that I didn’t know you at all. Would you like to know something else, something quite interesting, if you cared about me at all? They said that, as I was your lover, then, obviously, I was a homosexual and as such, not deserving of the...protection the other prisoners had. And that, as a *queer*,” he spat the poi-

sonous term out, “then, I would be more than willing to keep them...happy.” He saw the dawning horror on Blake’s mobile face. “Oh, yes, your suspicions are all too true. They raped me, frequently, during the entire time they were investigating me.”

“How long....”

“Two months.”

“Oh, Avon, I’m so sorry...”

“Well now, pity isn’t going to do me much good now, is it? A bit of honesty then, the right to choose whether or not I wanted to openly associate with a Rebel, a traitor...that would have been much more to my taste.”

“What happened after you were released?”

“I was having a rather...difficult time. Employers are leery, no matter how much of a genius you might be, of taking on someone who has such a large and obvious black mark against their name. And then, I met...Anna. She was wonderful to me, truly...wonderful And that made me realise, seeing how happy I was with her, how quickly and deeply I fell in love with her, just how shallow and pathetic and feeble *our* relationship had been.” He hurried on, not daring to allow Blake speech. “She had contacts, friends in high places, because of her husband. She introduced me to one of her associates and he agreed to give me a job in the banking system.”

“Which you then proceeded to rob, for Anna. Avon, are you blind? Can’t you see that she was a Federation plant, that she set you up?”

Avon came at him, hands outstretched like the gnarled and twisted fingers of a corpse, lunging for Blake’s throat. “Don’t you ever *dare* to say anything like that about her again!”

Blake, bigger and heavier and unblinded by rage, wrestled him to the bed, landing on top of him, confining the writhing twisting body beneath the bulk of his own. “Avon,” he said, gripping the man’s wrists in his own big hands, “Avon! Stop it!” Avon brought a vicious knee up towards Blake’s groin and the rebel tangled their legs together, bringing them groin to groin. Eyes locked with Avon’s, the hatred burning between them, Blake realised with shock that the man beneath him had an erection, that the hate in those eyes was a passionate one, that the body under his was squirming and rolling, rubbing them together. True memory flooded him, memories of the vicious fights after the quiet afternoons, of the jealous ire hurled in his face, only to be followed by sweet kisses.

“That’s the way it’s so often been between us, isn’t it, Avon? This love-hate, this fighting passion. This is

what turns you on. And when this mood hit you, we would have to go through this, time after time, you needing to fight me, needing to have me literally beat you into submission so that you could allow yourself to have sex. That way—*this* way—you couldn't be held responsible for having sex with a man, for falling in love with someone who was foolish enough to be born a man who wants only men."

"Get off me, Blake."

"Was that your stock phrase? Your excuse? I'm so much bigger than you, how could you possibly be expected to resist? That's the truth of it, my friend. You wanted me—loved me—too much to let me go, but you couldn't break free of your narrow minded, conditioned homophobia." He thrust against Avon, hard himself now, scraping the rough fabric of his trousers against the tender skin beneath him. "Well, it wouldn't do to disappoint you, would it, not after all these years..."

Still angry, Blake plundered Avon's mouth, sucking on his tongue, drawing his breath from him. "I'll give you what we *both* want, Avon," he whispered, sinking slowly into the warmth, the passion awaiting him. When Avon brought his arms up to encircle him, Blake felt a sudden, overwhelming surge of homecoming, of belonging. "Oh god, Avon," he groaned, "I didn't even know this was what I was so hungry for, didn't know this was what I was driven to search for..."

Freed from responsibilities for his feelings, Avon threw himself into the lovemaking, filling his arms and his heart with the man over him, whispered, reassuring words pouring from him and into Blake. He hugged Blake's welcome girth to him, frantic, desperate to feel him inside, to feel the size and weight of him again. He ripped at Blake's clothes, getting them off him, uncaring of where the shirt and trousers and boots went. Enraptured, face flushed, he cradled Blake's cock and balls in his hand, staring at them, then swooping down, swallowing him with remembered, fervent ease. He drank in the taste of him, the smell of him, the relief map of veins throbbing and pulsing on his tongue. He moaned, muscles massaging heavy cock, sucking the cum up, licking a drop from the head. He sat back, staring at the transfigured Blake, at the glorious sight of him, naked and hard and ecstatic. "Blake..." he whispered, lost once again in that secret Nirvana he could only ever find if Blake led him to it. He gripped the generous cock in both hands, drawing the foreskin back and forth to hood

the head, pulling it back to display the round, full tip, the ridge of the glans. He bent down to suck it again, but those huge and wonderfully powerful hands stayed him, raising him for a deep, loving kiss. He drowned, and didn't care, for dying in this man's arms had always been such heady bliss.

Blake laid his lover back on the bed, Avon's fine hands busily spreading precum over Blake's cock, adding natural lubricant to the lingering wetness of his sucking. He spread his legs, anxious—desperate—for Blake. The big man leaned forward, bending Avon's slender legs up over his shoulders, folding him almost in half, opening his arse up for display. Blake pushed forward, sinking into yielding, tensile flesh. Pain flashed through Avon, for it had been a very long time since he had done this and Blake's build had always stretched him to absolute capacity. He stared into Blake's brown eyes, feeding on the hunger there and in their joined bodies. He was pounded, battered, bruised from uncontrolled passion, painfully full and—happy. Blake grinned down at him, sharing the moment, sharing the joy, until his eyes closed, his thrusts becoming more intense, deeper. Avon pulled on his own cock, matching Blake, movement for movement, uniting with him in the moment of orgasm, that instant of brilliant, exquisite glory.

Avon lay still under Blake, until his muscles quivered with cramps and the rebel eased him down. They lay together, sleepy, sated, satisfied after months—centuries—of abstinence. Slumber crept over them, still enmeshed, still wrapped together in the bonds of the past and the hopes of the future.

Avon awoke several hours later, to the almost forgotten sensation of a heavy, sleeping body draped across him. He lay awake, thinking, feeling, seeing the past anew, seeing Blake again. He rolled out from under the comforting arm and leg, and padded, naked and sticky, into the bathroom. After he had bathed, he returned to his bedside, standing still as a cenotaph, thinking. Eventually, his presence at the bedside—or perhaps his absence from his side, woke Blake up. The rebel stretched with luxurious, languorous ease and opened his eyes. Wordless, Avon stared down into the sleepy, loving eyes gazing up at him.

"Get up," he finally said.

Puzzlement furrowed the broad brow. "What?"

"Surely even you can understand monosyllabic terms. I said, *get up*."

Blake propped himself up, wiping the sleep from

his eyes and the dreams from his mind as Avon dressed, slowly pulling on the many layers of his protective armour. “What’s wrong? I thought we had sorted things out last night...”

“You’re not Vila, so stop acting like an idiot. We resolved *nothing* last night, we merely fucked an old memory.”

“Avon,” Blake said warningly, “don’t do this to us...”

“Us?” Avon sneered, ugly disdain marring his pretty mouth. “Last night proved to me that there is no ‘us’, as you so coyly put it. Yes, you are still as bent as a corkscrew and yes, I concede that I do still...enjoy sex with you, but nothing else has changed. It is still sex, and sex alone, which holds us to each other.”

“How can you say that, after last night? What the hell is the matter with you?”

“Nothing,” Avon hissed at him. “The problem is still yours. Think about this, Fearless Leader. If, as you are trying so hard to convince me, there is more to ‘us’ than sex, then why,” his brittle façade crumbled, the vulnerability and the agony and the rank betrayal shot out for a moment, blinding Blake, “oh, *why*, when you saw me again, lived with me here on the *Liberator*, why did that supposed love never show its face? Too shy, perhaps? Or simply too false, too much of a convenient lie to get me into your bed and into your pocket? I have had enough of you and your lies and your manipulations and...”

“And I have had enough of your self-destructive insecurities. Avon, what the hell do you want from me? How could I possibly display love for you—in case you’ve forgotten, the bloody Federation *mindwiped* me.”

“Oh, they certainly did, didn’t they? Apart, of course, for your damned Cause. You seem to have no trouble remembering *that*, do you now?”

Blake sat up, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed, his nakedness flaunting itself in front of Avon’s thirsty eyes. The tech threw clothes at Blake. Pointedly, knowingly, the rebel calmly laid them aside, rising to his feet, coming close to the other man. “I can remember facts quite well, Avon, as you well know. Details such as how to operate standard equipment, food processors and the like, but the *people*... That’s entirely different and...”

“Do you take me for a complete fool? You remembered your uncle and cousin perfectly, and yet I, for some reason, have slipped your mind completely. Obviously, it is because I was less important to you

than either your cause or some cousin you hadn’t seen since childhood.”

“Don’t be absurd, Avon. Now that my memories of you are beginning to return...”

“The empty platitudes are returning with them. Tell me,” bitterness painted his voice the colour of old blood, “what *do* you recall of your...little affaire with me? The lust, the fighting, the falling-outs?”

Blake flooded Avon with his affections, holding him by the shoulders, drawing him in ever closer, almost daring an embrace. “I remember the love,” he whispered, voice warm, mulled wine on a winter’s night.

Some of Avon’s ice melted, but he still pulled away. “There was no love there, Blake.” Back to Blake’s eyes, hidden away from the perceptive, persuasive gaze, he slowly revealed himself, filling Blake with almost overpowering emotions. “Love,” Avon continued, a faint, fragile sound in the dimness of the womb-like room, “for it to exist, requires trust and honesty. For two people to love, there must be absolutely no deceit between them, no secret lives. And look at ‘us’. You were a Resistance leader, yet never once thought to mention so minor a detail to me, even though you were risking my life.”

“Let me explain...”

“No, let me finish. You never, obviously, trusted me and you had another entire life, completely apart from the one you shared so sparingly with me. Oh, there was lust aplenty and the delusion of love, but that was all.”

“That simply is not true, Avon. How could I possibly have told you about my involvement with the Resistance? Your father used to be head of the Internal Justice Department, an incorruptible IJD man, loyal to the core.”

“It is hardly my fault that my father was what he was. Anyway, my late father’s job is a terribly feeble excuse. Surely you can come up with something better?”

“How about not wanting to endanger you by giving you information the Federation would kill you for?”

“Equally pathetic.”

“Avon, I still don’t have full possession of my time with you, it is still spotty, filled with holes. But I do know that I had very good reasons for not telling you, for...”

“For betraying me by simply disappearing from my life one day?” Avon turned on Blake, hurt driving him, as always, to viciousness. “No, there is only

one reason and one reason alone why you never bothered to impart details of such a tremendously important part of your life to me: you simply didn't care enough, there simply wasn't the love there."

Furious, Blake grabbed Avon again, giving him a good shake. The tech wrapped himself in dignity and with a glance, froze Blake's hands from him. "I can tell you, with utter certainty," he continued quietly, "because I did eventually find the authentic article. Perhaps I should thank you, actually. I was...on the rebound, I believe you would say, somewhat thrown by your betrayal and so, when Anna introduced herself to me, I leapt at the chance for a new relationship, a way to fill the nights. And with her, Blake, I discovered trust and honesty and the security of having no secret lives to tear us apart."

"But she isn't here now, and I am."

"And I would gladly have the two of you swap places. You can't hold a candle to her, Blake."

One of Blake's hands cupped Avon's cheek, turning the dark head to stare into deep, brown eyes. "No? Perhaps not. But I am here, and she is not and surely we should rebuild what we had before?"

With a venomous twist of his head, Avon pulled away. "No thanks. One house of cards, built on sand, is more than enough for one lifetime." He started towards the door, preparing to escape into the soothing balm of work.

"It wasn't that at all," Blake yelled, losing his patience. "We were in love, we had quite a relationship, even if you're too much of a coward to admit it."

Avon's back stiffened in mute eloquence. "And you would have us go through it all again? Why, Blake? So that you could betray me once again? If you had truly loved me, the way you said, then why did you feel nothing for me when we met again?"

Blake remembered enough, and had learned enough, to recognise that tone of conciliation, Avon's tacit request for someone to force him to love, to break free from his self-imposed prison of safety...and loneliness.

"Avon," Blake murmured, deep voice a purring caress, "how do you know I felt nothing for you? Always jumping to unhappy conclusions—I swear you could find a bad side to a silver lining." He stroked Avon's back, kneading out some of the tension and pain. "I was drawn to you from the first, on the *London*. Oh, I didn't know why, but it was there. More than attraction, more than mere interest. I wanted to have you with me, at my side. You can't deny that, can you?"

"Oh, can't I?" Avon asked drily.

"Not and still tell the truth, anyway. No, it has been there. Why do you think I never complained when you would grab hold of me in an explosion, or a storm. Why I always sought you out? Why I put up with your foul temper and fouler disposition, even defended you to the others?"

"Do you honestly expect me to believe such a patent tissue of lies?"

"No, actually, I don't."

"Then why are you wasting both our times? I can only speak for myself, of course, but I for one, have far more important things to do than..."

"Than sort out your life for the better, hmmm?" Blake interrupted. "Shall I tell you why I never even tried to act upon my feelings? Because Vila told me what you said when he made a pass at you. And I had no wish to have my balls made into earrings."

"That was different, that was Vila. I wouldn't have rejected you, had you bothered to approach me."

Blake could here Avon's decision wavering in his voice. He slipped his arms around the other man, leaning Avon's back against his own naked chest, rubbing his hands in circles over and over the leather-clad chest. "But I thought that your reaction was because you were a hetero, not to mention positively homophobic. It was simply too great a risk to take."

"And last night, of course, I solved your dilemma for you."

"Yes. And very satisfyingly, too," Blake murmured, lips against Avon's nape. "Well, Avon? Give it one more try, shall we? One more chance at love, one more try at being together? You know my deepest, darkest secret already, so there can finally be trust between us and honesty."

Avon rested lightly against Blake comfortable bulk, soaking in the man's heat, warm memories racing and tumbling through his mind. The hands on his chest started to undo buttons, and he watched, mind going over the so familiar scene. "And if I refuse?"

The hands stilled, then began once more. "Then I shall simply try to persuade you, that's all."

The insidious luxury and peace of being with Blake stole through Avon, and he warmed himself at the banked blaze of this one man who could always make him willing to follow. He leaned back, resting his head on Blake, closing his eyes, not seeing Blake's smile of success, nor the glint of happiness shining from him. "And can I trust you, this time?" he asked, beginning to drift under Blake's ministrations.

“You know you can always trust me, Avon. No more secrets.”

Avon turned to look at him, searching dark eyes, finding the honesty there. “All right,” he whispered,

hands coming up to cradle Blake’s grinning face. “All right. Once more, it is, then. And no more betrayals...”

“Never, Avon. I shall never betray *you*.”

The next time he did, Avon killed him.