HE SHOULDN’T HAVE DONE IT, HE KNEW HE SHOULDN’T HAVE DONE IT. Of course, at this point, he wasn’t sure what it was he had done, but whatever it was, he knew he shouldn’t have. Which left him lying in the dark, the fetid murk of his mind trying to work out not only what the hell it was that he had done that he really shouldn’t have, but also such minor details as where the hell he was—and who the hell was in bed with him. For if there was one thing of which he was absolutely certain, it was that he was not alone. Not by a long chalk, judging by the heat and the bulk he could sense behind himself. He considered turning over to see who it was, but that involved several truly unpleasant options, not least of which was the matter of discovering with whom, precisely, he had done whatever it was he shouldn’t have done. Whatever that was...

Tentatively, he moved his head on the pillow—pillow? Yes, definitely a pillow, definitely a bed, albeit altogether too narrow, definitely some very peculiar bedding. Not to mention the bedmate...—and discovered that his head didn’t fall off when he moved, nor did a horde of tap-dancing michelin-men start hobnailing it about. So, whatever it was he shouldn’t have done, although he had been stupid enough to get drunk enough that he had ‘it’, whatever ‘it’ was, he hadn’t been so stupid as to get drunk without first taking a very effective hangover cure first. The main drawback of that, of course, was the fact that it left his entire body rather pleasantly numb, which left him rather pleasantly unaware of whatever the hell his body had been up to the night before. This being the morning after, however, he was beginning to wonder if it might not be better for his state of mind if his body were in slightly worse condition. If that were the case, then at least a discreet squirm or two would give him some idea of whatever it was that he had done that he shouldn’t have. So, no obvious physical signs, bar the recognisable vagueness that was a hangover—that wasn’t. He knew he should feel as sick as a dead parrot, but the medicine had blocked that. He knew that his head should feel as if it were going to fall off—but all he had was the uncomfortable sensation that several screws were loose. And all of them had to do with last night.

He felt like a child locked in his bedroom at night, with an aggressively raucous grown-ups’ party going on in the living room. He dreaded it, even though he had no idea what it was. He really should turn over. Really, he ought to. Get it over with. After all, how terrible could it be? All right, so he had got drunk—inward, horrified cringe at that—and fucked someone. What was so awful about that? Backtrack, he thought to himself, go back over yesterday evening. Spacefall early evening local time, mid-afternoon our time. Mindless morons in endless meetings, then I got rid of Blake and went out to sample what passes for night life—if you get so drunk you go blind. Pub, with Jenna and Gan and Vila. Cally hovering round, as she will, some drinks, lots of chit-chat, more drinks, even Cally getting rather merry, more drinks and then...

He couldn’t remember. There was something, and then nothing, and then waking up here. The bit in the middle was a cypher to him. Well, he’d always been embarrassingly good at puzzles, so let’s go through this piece by piece. Drinks, in that pub that would have been called ‘charmingly rustic’ on a civilised planet, but which was the height of sophistication on this back-water mudball. Then...Oh, yes, then there was that. Walking along the boring street, arm-in-arm with what some ignorant, unsophisticated observers might have called drunken camaraderie. With Vila singing solo, until Jenna had joined in with that song about the dong with
the luminous nose and where he'd shoved it and what had happened when... Well, it had seemed funny and sexy at the time. That was when... Oh, bloody hell, what had happened next? He rubbed his face into the pillow, trying to clear the muddiness from his mind. The magic pills might get rid of every symptom imaginable, but they couldn't do a damned thing for the fuzziness of the mouth or the mind. He struggled—rather lethargically, his brain at least half dead—through the gauze and then the next part came back to him.

The Brothel. Groaning, he wished, most fervently, that his mind had remained what was now looking like a very comforting blank. Oh, yes, then had come the brothel. With Jenna doing a strip on the table and—

He had, hadn't he? He'd poured champagne—or fizzy grape juice, it being a local product—all over her, so that everyone could lick it off her. And everyone had. Jenna. God, he had fucked Jenna. Well now, no-one was going to be surprised by that, were they? Apart from himself, of course. Jenna. It could be worse, he supposed. At least she was intelligent and strong, independent, forceful—had great tits. Yes, it could be worse. Jenna wouldn't be after him to father her children, wouldn't be looking for a long-term commitment—for that matter, Jenna probably wouldn't even be looking for a second go. He tended to be embarrassingly enthusiastic when drunk. But then, Jenna was the athletic type, not to mention inventive and adventurous. And as he had mentioned before, she was very forceful. He could still remember the day on the flight deck when Vila, with a mouth bigger than space itself and never as empty, had asked her how she would describe herself in bed. “Dominant,” she'd said, and he had almost been able to feel every cock in the room spring to attention. He flexed a little, but he couldn't feel anything, let alone whether or not Jenna had plied any little specialities on him.

But... Something was missing, apart from his memory. That was it: Jenna's perfume. It wasn't there, and it wasn't the kind of thing you could avoid noticing. How they ever managed to get past guards was beyond him—you could always smell Jenna before you saw her coming. So it wasn't Jenna then. Which left the question begging: if it wasn't Jenna, then who the hell was it? He was tempted to roll over, but if he wanted to see whoever it was he had done whatever it was that he shouldn't have done it at all with, then he would have to put the light on. Which would probably waken whoever it was, and that was definitely something he shouldn't do. The last thing he wanted was to face someone in the moment when he learned who it was: one might reveal all sorts of things that one really didn't want revealed. Such as shock that one had actually gone to bed with whoever it was he had gone to bed with. He didn't much fancy his chances if Cally were to see his horrified shock if he'd gone to bed with her. Worst thing about sleeping with Cally was that you couldn't keep your mind out of the bedroom. She was more interested in cerebral knowledge than carnal knowledge, which was fine—in a person who wasn't a telepath and who wasn't sleeping with Avon.

But...hadn't Cally gone off with that tall dark-haired woman? The one with the gorgeous rump? He thought she had... Oh, yes, that comment Vila had made, the one that had gone right to his head—the head he kept in his trousers, that was right: Cally had gone off with the brunette, and Jenna... Now what had Jenna done? He pondered this for quite some time, rebuilding the few sotted fragments he could come up with. Ah, yes. Jenna. And the entire crew from the spacers' transport. Ah, yes, Jenna, a woman of enormous taste and even more enormous libido. Not to mention stamina. He could feel himself beginning to droop at the mere thought of it all. But drooping like a wall flower wasn't getting him any nearer to solving his puzzle. And unless he wanted to confront his bedmate all unprepared and therefore vulnerable, he had better work out who the hell he was with—and what it was he had done. Without knowing why, he cringed at that, which made him all the more nervous. What the hell had he done that his mind was being as coy as a maiden with a lace fan, trying to hide the details from him—whilst dying a death of embarrassment at the very mention of last night?
All right, let's be logical about this. It wasn't Jenna, she had her hands—and no doubt some other important bits—full. It wasn't Cally—she'd grown tired of his shilly-shallying and gone off with someone who was far more willing and far less afraid of true intimacy. All right, so we have eliminated the two ladies—and I use the term loosely—he thought with a smile at how the two females in question would react to being lumped in with the effete upper elite, whilst he absenthly stroked his inner thigh, where the flesh tingled so pleasantly in response. Which leaves us with the three men—although we do use that term very loosely. Let us suppose that it was Gan. Worst thing there is the man's lack of sophistication, wittiness and sexual adventurism. Not to mention the no-doubt lachrymose lamentations that would follow as soon as the great lump opened his eyes and realised what he had done the night before: Gan was distressingly heterosexual, bound by the most boring sort of middle-class, off-world morality that had ever got on Avon's nerves. Why, Gan couldn't see the beauty of a fraud for concentrating on the 'immorality' of it! Oh, god, he hoped it wasn't Gan. So many complications and guilts—or even worse. If Gan decided that this one slip meant a basic shift in his orientation, then that meant months of calves' eyes being made at him and great sighs being heaved. What a nauseating prospect, thought Avon, who liked his sex to be lots of lusty fun and no lingering cloying ties. But if it were Gan... Oh, all right, so he rather liked the man, but not to have sex with! Surely he hadn't been so drunk that he'd gone to bed with him just to find out if his prick was as big as the rest of him, as Vila was sure it must be. But—Gan really is big, all over, he thought, trying to tally the bulk behind him in whatever bed he was in with the bulk of Gan on, say, the flight deck. With a sigh of relief, he realised that the two simply did not add up. So. If not Gan...

Vila. That little prick, it had to be Vila. The little bastard had been trying to crawl into his bed from the first day in the holding cells and had turned bitchy—at least until he'd realised that this wasn't the usual prison set-up and he didn't need a daddy to survive without such delicacies of gaol life as gang-rape and public use. Oh, yes, it'd be just up his alley—so to speak—to wait until I'm two sheets to the wind and then tumble me. I'll murder him, how dare he? After I've said no, to come after me like that. At least I was drunk, which is some excuse for such a fall in good taste. Not that Vila is all that bad: he does have good hands—perk of the trade, I suppose—and a wonderfully mordant sense of humour. Actually, for all that he's a Delta, he does rather well—far wittier than Gan or even Blake, for that matter. But still, to have ended up soused and fucked by a Delta... He wriggled a little, but couldn't get past the medicine to find out if he had the characteristic aches and niggling pains that always came from a return to the more...salubrious pleasures of life after an eternity of abstinence. The pills obviously did a wonderful job on the headache of hangover, but they were a real pain when one was trying to work out whether one had been the fuckee or the fucker. He could always ask, he supposed, but how humiliating. Pardon me, Vila, but did you fuck me last night? And did I enjoy it?

Oh, how too, too embarrassing! And the repercussions, my god, the repercussions! Well, actually, he thought, calming down a little, they might not be so dreadful as all that. After all, Vila has been round the maypole a few times—all right, so that's the understatement of the century, the randy little toad—so he's not going to do a Gan on me by expecting some sort of following-through. He's not going to want intimacy, the way Cally does—he most certainly is not going to expect me to keep up with Jenna's appetites, for which we can be truly grateful. As for affection...I am rather fond of him, in a roundabout fashion. I have known worse—Blake springs to mind with unfortunate alacrity—and at least I can keep Vila in his place. He won't be clinging to me every second of the day. We already share the same set of ethics—or lack thereof, as the case may be—so he won't be coming after me with pamphlets on the glorious Cause. And he is rather attractive, in a mousy, unthreatening sort of way. Apart from when he smiles at one, with that knowing twinkle in his eye. Ah, yes, that
little twinkle. The bastard set me up. No two ways about it, no doubt at all. Get me drunk, get me to bed and then...

Oh, all right, so Vila hadn’t precisely got him drunk—he’d done that all by himself, hadn’t he? And, he thought with a sudden, threatening lurch of his gullet, Vila had gone off with one of the ‘ladies’ at the brothel, the Arellian with the enormous breasts. He considered shaking his head, but the memory wasn’t worth the effort. He could’ve sworn that she’d had three breasts, but that was impossible, wasn’t it? But then again… There were other impossibilities and now he knew, for an absolute certainty and beyond all doubt, reasonable or otherwise, what it was he had done that he shouldn’t have. And now that he remembered, he really shouldn’t have.

Blake.

He’d fucked Blake. Or even worse, god, end-of-the-Universe worse—he had let Blake fuck him. Maybe. He was rather terrifyingly fuzzy on that detail. What the hell had they got up to, that he didn’t dare remember? All right, all right, he told himself, taking the same kind of deep, calming breaths the condemned took to help them face execution, just think about it, work it out, put all the pieces together. Go back to the beginning…

Blake, on the flight deck, saying things so heavily laden with innuendo that Avon’d sprung an instant erection, even though everything the sanctimonious prick had said had been designed to tease by suggesting sex while refusing the possibility of it—but always with the tantalising tag of ‘well, perhaps, if you have balls enough to prove otherwise…’ Invitation to rape, that was what Blake was. Well, not rape, but definitely a very forceful seduction. Lead me astray, was what it seemed to Avon that Blake was saying to him. Avon’d made no secret of the flexibility of his libido, made only the discreetest of veils to cover what he had done and what he was willing to do in the future. And Blake had listened to every word, had responded to every unspoken word and all but challenged Avon to prove that everyone was willing, given the right circumstances. But nothing seemed to be the right circumstance and he was going insane with the frustration of not being able to bring Blake to heel—or free himself from this obsession with showing Blake who was top-man round here.

And judging by the way he had conveniently managed to forget all the salient—and, no doubt, salacious—details of the night before, here he was on the morning after wondering what the hell he had let himself in for. He conceded, with a groan, that fucking Blake was probably not the best idea in the Universe. In fact, the only thing in its favour was that it was better than being fucked by Blake. Now there was something he really didn’t want to examine too closely. It smacked, rather uncomfortably, of yielding. Of conceding that Blake was a force to be reckoned with. Well, at least it proved one thing: that not even the great Kerr Avon was immune to the notion that what happened in bed dictated what happened out of it. If that were true…he didn’t dare show his face on the flight deck again. After all, if he’d spent the night saying, ‘yes, yes, Blake’, he was going to look a proper prat saying ‘no, no’ in the day. It was…hard, for want of a better word under the circumstances, to confront someone with the cutting slash of logic when you knew that every time they looked at you, they were remembering you on your back with your knees in the air. Or even more undermining, on your knees with your arse in the air. Oh, what a stench there was going to be from this particular kettle of fish. To have let Blake fuck him…

And, damn it all, to not even remember the great event the morning after. If he was going to be hung, it would be small recompense if he could at least remember the sheep that had got him hung. Or the ram that was hung… He did shake his head then, realising that he was mentally meandering, playing with words to avoid them, toying with them to take the sting from them. But it didn’t matter. He had done it. He. Had. Done. It. With Blake. With Blake, of all people. Thank goodness he had been drunk, though—he hated to think he could be both so incredibly self-destructive and horrifyingly stupid when sober. And if he had thought there to be repercussions from sleeping with Vila, well, there wouldn’t be so much as ripples from this as tsunamis. Lots
and lots and lots of them, he thought with a sudden burst of self pity, imagining himself trying to make Blake see sense and having Blake repeat back one the really idiotic things that one was prone to saying in the heat of the moment. Or the heat of the body. He did get on the maudlinly romantic side when actually inside another person’s body, but at least that would still be better than having been fucked by Blake. He couldn’t believe it. Not Blake. Surely, even drunk, he wouldn’t have been insane enough to have let Blake fuck him.

But then, he reminded himself with scrupulous and vindictive honesty, you did ask for it. Literally. Remember? And unfortunately, he did. He had been so sure of himself, so convinced that it was such a good idea. Just waltz up there, seduce Blake, fuck him into oblivion, being as dominant and macho and supercilious as possible, force Blake to admit to having latent desires and even more importantly, latent respect, for Avon himself and...

He’d bumped into Blake when he’d wandered off on his own after the others had all found companions for the night, and lain in wait until Blake was available—in more ways than one. All the Dutch courage he’d imbibed had gone to his head, numbing his brain as surely as if it were already dead and swimming quite mindlessly in formaldehyde. Oh, no, he muttered inwardly, I didn’t actually say that, did I? Oh, but he had, as his rising blush proved. To have been so...so...adolescent, at his age, and with his experience behind him, and with his reputation—and to have said it to Blake! A fate worse than death, indeed.

At least Blake didn’t have a big mouth like Vila, who would have broadcast it all over the ship and half the known worlds while he was at it. But then, the queasiness in his stomach reminded him. Blake had used all that inside information he had on Jenna to keep Jenna very sweet—or as sweet as Jenna was ever inclined to be. And everyone, but everyone, knew all about Blake and Avalon. And Fionulla. And Morag. And...

Perhaps he could hang himself before Blake woke up. Instead of taking such dire—not to mention permanent—action, he frowned, trying to remember what he had said after he had...persuaded Blake to come back up to the ship with him. It was all a disturbingly murky greyish-brown colour, as if he’d had his eyes shut the entire time. But...Now there was an interesting thing, a peculiar little awareness that was slithering down his spine like a lecher’s paw: anger. Now why the hell was he angry at Blake? No, nothing so banal nor mild as merely angry. He was furious, absolutely bloody furious. Spitting tacks. Blood boiling. Any number of phrases would do, as long as they were suitably violent. Curious, he probed at it with all the skill and finesse of a surgeon, and when that didn’t work, he went at it like a bull in a china shop. And when that didn’t work, he did the only thing available to him in the circumstances. He got even angrier. Blake, being his typical bloody self, had obviously done something truly iniquitous, but then, that was par for the course and he’d been a fool to expect anything else.

And he hated being made a fool.

Which meant that Blake was going to pay for whatever it was that Blake had done last night that Blake was about to learn that he really shouldn’t have done. Just as soon as he remembered what it was that Blake shouldn’t have done, he’d kill him. Slowly. Now there was a tremendously comforting thought. It had rather a nice ring to it, a pretty irony, the getting back at Blake for whatever it was that they had both done. It served the conniving bastard right for all the other things he’d done that Avon hadn’t been able to wreak revenge upon him for. He was going to enjoy this—especially as blaming Blake left him free to completely ignore his own part in the whole débâcle. It was quite fair, really, if you looked at it from the right point of view—i.e. Avon’s, and excluding Blake’s. There were far too many times Blake had got off scot free, but he’d get him for this, whatever ‘this’ was.

It was ridiculous, he stoked his righteous anger, for Blake to take advantage of his lapse from grace, which was a nice way of avoiding the fact that it was Avon who had set out to seduce Blake in the first place. Deciding to seduce someone was hardly grounds for—whatever it was that Blake had done. Avon...
squirmed a bit at the thought, an uneasy awareness crawling through his skull like lice. Perhaps Blake hadn’t been entirely at fault here.

So? Why should he let that stop him? After all, Blake had never let a minor detail such as fairness stop him before, why should Avon be any different? Why should I be any different from Blake—apart from the principle of the matter, very few things in life being worse than being the same as Blake. Apart, of course, from being fucked by the megalomaniac bastard. Oh, why, why, why had he conceived the notion of proving his point to Blake in bed? His cock twitched, putting in its own potent reminder. Apart from that, he said to himself. And if he’d been so appallingly randy that he would have considered sleeping with Blake, why not simply reduce the frustration by fucking Vila? As both Delta and thief, Vila was well used to servicing people, so why not simply take him in hand, so to speak.

Because I like him, his honesty piped up before he could strangle it. Because I like him. Be that as it may, he answered, that’s no reason to be nice to the little snot, is it? In fact, liking someone was the best reason he knew for backing off at a rate of knots and running off to the farthest star. After Anna… Well, after Anna, he hadn’t been up to much, in more ways than one, and the drugs in the prison food hadn’t exactly helped. That was probably a lot of what was wrong, he consoled himself, telling himself that it was all because the drugs had finally lapsed out of his system and let his libido kick in—with a vengeance, not to mention a really sick sense of humour, considering that he had gone after Blake. What on earth had possessed him? Being drunk obviously gave besotted an entirely new meaning. But Blake. How could he have let it be Blake? And how could he have come up with such an insanity, drunk or sober?

Perhaps because he’d always had a weakness for big, burly men with masses of curls and a smooth chest and soft skin and large hands and hung like a horse and… He was beginning to wish his brain was still drunk, or at least unconscious. The last thing he wanted to do was succumb to a litany of Blake’s charms. Eyes still closed, he considered that possibility, examining it from every angle he could think of, a probability square of the mind. Was he succumbing to Blake? Falling in love with him?

Well? Was he?

His cock twitched again, whilst his mind and heart remained impassive. Thank god, thought the atheist, I was getting worried for a minute there. Lust I can deal with. Lust I know and like and lust is something I can control. Apart, an awkward confession twinged through him, from when I’m drunk and do something I know I shouldn’t have done, even if I don’t know what it is that I’ve done. Yet—a circumstance that he was absolutely certain that Blake would be more than anxious to reverse. I’m sure that Blake will be quick enough to regale me with every salacious fact—suitably embroidered with puerile crudeness, just to make it really entertaining. But if he thinks I’m going to just lie here, waiting here for him to deign to tell me what I did—his version of what I did—when I did whatever it was I really shouldn’t have done. Although I have some rather unpleasantly prurient ideas of what it was that I got up to. But I’ll be damned if I shall lie here on tenterhooks whilst Blake snores his way through my life.

They say that defence is the better part of valour, but in Avon’s book, attack was better than defence any day of the week. Especially the morning after the night before. Umbrage in full flight, he slapped the light switch on and turned round to give Blake a very sharp piece of his mind and the even sharper edge of his tongue and found—

—Vila. Who was wide eyed, wide awake and really not what Avon had been expecting at all. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Oh, that’s nice, that is. It’s my fucking bed, that’s what I’m doing here.” he glovered his disappointment at Avon. “But chance’d be a fine thing, wouldn’t it?”

Attack was still better than defence, although there was a certain amount of lingering alcohol induced stupidity that not even the finest hangover medicine could cure. But regardless of the evidence right in front of his eyes, Avon would have sworn blind that he’d
gone ‘home’ with Blake. He had been so sure that that was what it was that he shouldn’t have done. But now here was Vila, large as life and twice as confusing. “And what, precisely, is that supposed to mean?”

“Oh, don’t tell me you’ve forgotten, and it being such a wonderful experience an’ all. You,” Vila said, poking Avon in the chest, his tone that of disappointment rather than outrage, “came in here last night, shouting the odds about Blake and how he’d been and gone and fallen asleep on you in the middle of your best technique. And after you’d finished shouting about that, you decided you were going to fuck me, without so much as a by-your-leave—not that I would’ve said no, mind, but at least you could’ve asked—and then you crawled into bed with me, and then you were all over me, kissing and sucking and all that lovely stuff and then,“ his voice rising in outrage, “and then, after you’d got me all worked up, which not many men could manage, I don’t mind telling you, not after what I’d done already, but after all that, after I got me hopes—and me other bits—up, you couldn’t get your fucking thing up."

Avon was too busy staring at him in dumbfounded horror to think of a thing to say. His mind was busy, though, thinking such incoherent thoughts as those that revolved around the fact that he hadn’t let Blake fuck him. And that the thing he knew he shouldn’t have done was nothing more serious than a bad dose of brewer’s droop. With a Delta. After having crawled into the Delta’s bed. After having ‘kissed and sucked and all those other lovely things’ and what the hell was left after kissing and sucking, when he wasn’t up to anything else? What had he said... Vila, unhampered by the befuddlement of unaccustomed alcohol—all alcohol was a custom to him—was still saying things. Lots of things. Things that Avon really would much rather not hear. Except that it got him off the hook that was called Blake. And, he was honest with himself, with the rather major repercussions that would have come—so to speak—with Blake, Vila was by far the lesser of two evils.

“Limper’n my little finger, you were,” the lesser, though not smaller, of the two evils was moaning, “and less use. Couldn’t even get it up enough to make it worth my while to give it a good suck. Nothing, not a fucking sausage—more like a sodding worm, and one that’d been cut into tiny little pieces at that. And then,” Vila was leaning up on his elbow by now, digging his finger into Avon with each word, “just to make it all worthwhile, just to make it absolutely spectacularly fucking brilliant, you had to go and fall asleep, didn’t you. On me, just to make me feel really appreciated. And after what you had come in here shouting your mouth off about. But by the time you were finished—and it wasn’t very bloody long, I might add—there I was, all pumped up and ready to go, and you were busy doing your impersonation of the sainted Blake—dead as a fucking dodo and three times as heavy. And what did I get for my troubles? Pins and needles, that’s what I got, pathetic pins and needles, which is about what you amounted to last night. Come in here, waking me up from my well-deserved rest, then you got me all worked up, you did, all dickied up and nowhere to go. You and Blake, nothing between the pair of you, two peas in a pod. Yeah, that’s right, that’s what you two are. Tiny little balls that are about as much use as a virgin’s cunt.”

He wasn’t about to let that pass, not even when he had noticed that Vila was rather appealing when he was all rumpled and on his high horse. “Shut up, Vila, I—”

“Shut up, Vila, shut up, Vila. You didn’t give me much choice last night, did you? First you want me to open up, spread me legs for you, and just when I’m all set to do it—even though you never so much as asked, I might add—” this lacking the expected strength of protest, carrying more wistfulness than fury, “then you went and fell asleep and I had to get meself all shut up all over again. Not that it was easy, mind, I’m a man of great and enduring passion, all my friends tell me so. But I had to, cos you had nodded off right on top of me and I could hardly breathe never mind have a good wank. Took me hours to get back to sleep, and then my balls were sore, which is why I woke so fucking early when I don’t even have to be on watch for hours yet. And it’s all your fault.”
“All my fault?” Avon snapped, outraged that Vila should be so unfair—after all, it was, as everything else was, all Blake’s fault, surely. “Because you can’t control your animal instincts, you—”

“I can’t control? I can’t control? Who was it what came in to who last night, eh? You tell me that. Wasn’t me, was it, oh no, it was you, Mister Fancy Alpha. It was you who was shouting and moaning about Blake falling asleep before you could fuck him, wasn’t me making a proper charlie out of myself.”

It is very difficult to sneer down one’s nose at someone, when said someone is leaning over one and one is lying flat on one’s back in someone else’s bed, fielding complaints about one’s sexual talents. Difficult, certainly, but nothing was impossible for Avon. “And if I were,” he answered, feeling decidedly stung and very hard-done-by from the pointed and legitimate complaints, his pride dropping alarmingly, “it is only because you are contagious. You accuse me of making a fool of myself—how, when there was no-one else here to see me but you?”

It was as if he had stuck a pin in a balloon, Vila deflating to defeat with a suddenness that was enough to make even Avon feel like a heel. “Yeah?” Vila was saying, all bravado and braggadocio. “Yeah, well, you made so big a fool of yourself, you’d’ve been a complete and total fool even if you were the last man alive.”

If you were here, I’d still be the last man left alive, wouldn’t I?” But his conscience was tut-tutting at him, doing a rather unfortunately excellent impersonation of his maiden aunt. And when all was said and done—or not done, as the case might be, looking at last night—Vila really didn’t deserve to bear the brunt of his bruised pride and horrified embarrassment. He would rather, much rather, save that for later, and Blake...

“I didn’t get any complaints last night, which is more than I can say for you, isn’t it?” muttered Vila, the dig undoing all of Avon’s fledgling good intentions, whilst he bolstered his pride by refusing to give in completely, despite his much-vaunted and frequently displayed cowardice.

“Considering the inspiration available,” Avon retorted, taking a leaf out of Vila’s book and refusing to give in completely, although in his case, it had a lot more to do with pride than cowardice, “it’s hardly surprising I wasn’t exactly chomping at the bit.” He was quite pleased with himself, rather enjoying this decidedly déclassé interchange, all the more pleased because at least in Vila, he had someone who could give as good as he got—well, almost. Better, certainly, than Blake, who had a truly nasty habit of hitting the nail on the head—in public. Vila now, well Vila... He lay back down, looking at the other man, noticing his eyes, and the crinkle of smiles that lingered on his face, as if just waiting for the fun to begin again. Vila really wasn’t all that bad, if you were willing to concede that the right background and education weren’t everything. Vila at least always gave a man enough room to maneuver. Always gave a man his due, said the wrong thing at the right time so that Avon could sort them all out. Unlike Blake, who wanted to dissolve him into the casseroled mess of the bloody Cause. And then fell asleep on him, just when Avon had decided to seduce the bastard. He did, of course, without so much as a blink, ignore the fact that he had done something of the same to Vila...

Who was looking at him, as expectant as a broody hen. It appeared that he had missed something, some pearl of wisdom. No, he thought, erase that adage. I’m no swine, although perhaps Vila would argue the point with me. And he would be right, poor idiot. But he asks for it, and so well, too. So inviting, all his ignorances and witticisms—and here we must use the term at its very loosest—and sarcasms. Entertaining, if nothing else, and when all one had to look forward to was either being killed by the Federation or Blake’s good intentions, a little entertainment could go a long way. And to give credit where credit was due, Vila did have a knack for making all this nightmare seem as if it were purely temporary, a minor aberration on the way to a life filled with an excess of riches and an embarrassment of vices. Larcenous little bastard, he thought with a smile. He’d steal the gold from a corpse—but say sorry whilst he did it. Charming, really, in his own way, and those...
hands—such deftness, more than you would expect even from an accomplished thief. And he certainly is the best in his field, would never have been caught, if he hadn’t trusted the wrong people. I wonder, he thought with the familiar bit of bitterness, if he knew the same people I did... Another thing in common. Plus, Vila’s Dome born and bred, he knows precisely where we both stand, without a word needing to be said. All of it tacit, but true nonetheless, with no messy disagreements or expectations...

“Well?” Vila was saying, and Avon was brought back to himself, suddenly hoping the fool would tell him what had been said whilst he’d been off wool-gathering with the able assistance of hangover pills and the after-effects of the alcohol, which was hanging around in his bloodstream, as useful as a gigolo at a wedding. Or a rebel leader who fell asleep the one and only time you didn’t want him to. But then, if considering how limited his mental capacities were right at the moment, he wasn’t going to waste them on thinking about a man he couldn’t decide if he loved or hated—or merely loved hating. He refused to entertain the idea that it might be more a case of him hating loving Blake—that just did not bear thinking about. If he had thought that being fucked by Blake would cause repercussions, loving the man brought difficulties beyond measure. But then, of course, it could be as simple as pure lust fed by a rather enticingly big frame and genitalia of dimensions wondrously large, but if that were the case—and Vila was talking at him again.

He really must do something about this odd in-and-out of focus sensation, something to countermand these strange instructions that seemed to be coming from some peculiar part of his brain where the pain killing effect of the pills wasn’t needed, but some kind of sobriety was. Just how much had he consumed last night? By the way his brain wasn’t functioning, probably more in one night than he had in his entire life before. But it was rather pleasant, in an undisciplined, irresponsible, totally un-Alpha way. Very pleasant...

But he needed something to get his tongue reconnected to the sharply witty comments fluttering around the inside of his skull. Some nutrition, perhaps—or, he thought, feeling rather wickedly self-indulgent, not even bothering to find out how long before he had to take his shift, the hair of the dog that bit him. The person for that was, undoubtedly, none other than Vila himself. His current bedmate. That had...something to it. Not familiarity, but perhaps... He could, he conceded, do worse. At least with Vila, there would be sex—and lots of it—without most of the complications that came part and parcel with the others. Then there was the fact that Vila was willing, or had been the previous night before Avon had humiliated himself by being no better than Blake. It would be quite delicious, really, such poetic justice if, by way of his proving that last night’s incompetence had been mere fluke, he were to begin by indulging himself with someone Blake was so damned sure was completely loyal—not to the Cause, not even Blake was capable of such self-delusion, but to Blake himself, as a person. As someone who listened to Vila, someone who treated Vila with equality—or at least that’s what Blake thought Vila thought. Now where did he know that from? Surely not last night? Surely he hadn’t been trying to seduce Blake only to have Blake keep on about the Cause? Surely not... But then, his memory prodded him, replaying, albeit decidedly fuzzily, all the images warped and wefted, the scenario of the night before. When he’d been sozzled enough to try to seduce Blake and Blake had been too sozzled to notice. Oh well, he said to himself with a cheerful relief, Blake’s ignorance a considerably comforting thought, we must be grateful for small mercies. Not that Blake could be described as small. Really, being on this ship was enough to give a man an inferiority complex. Or at least make him profoundly grateful that there were neither shared toilets nor communal showers.

Vila was still talking at him, all animated and pink and quite, quite naked, Avon noted with interest. By Vila’s own admission, he had been quite willing to let Avon fuck him last night. And there was an interesting thought. Of course, Avon knew perfectly well
that he could simply pin on a face of complete outrage and storm out of here—always supposing he could find wherever his clothes were—and that Vila would let him go. Oh, so the idiot would complain and snipe at him, but that was half the fun of their relationship.

Relationship? When the hell had he coined that particular phrase? Absolutely ages ago, he realised, but usually he had the good sense to ignore it completely. Relationship. Friendship. With Vila, In vino veritas, they said. He’d prefer lies, himself. Quite frequently did, in fact, it being safer to lie about caring than to admit it to himself when true and safest still to lie to others. But Vila?

And why not? He was bright, ill-educated; articulate, if one could unravel the maze of words; sensual and sensuous, if one could keep Vila’s mouth shut long enough to bed him; willing and obviously able. And best of all, he wasn’t Blake. If Blake, sobering up the morning after, were to realise what the hell Avon had been trying to do the night before, then Avon didn’t think very highly of his chances of making Blake take him seriously. Look, for example, at the way he started treating Jenna the day he realised just how much she wanted him. And the same thing with Cally, when he’d discovered that Cally wouldn’t exactly be averse to a little dalliance with her hero, their Fearless Leader. No, Avon didn’t much fancy the reception he would get, nor the viciousness of the battles that would follow. Despite appearances to the contrary, he didn’t want to end up killing Blake. Not by a long chalk.

But if he were to show up with Vila on his arm, after spending the night in his cabin, with the door very firmly locked, no less... Well, he hoped the door had been locked. He wasn’t sure of the time, but judging by how hungry he was, it had to be morning, and quite late at that. Which meant that the others probably knew. It was impossible to keep secrets on this ship: he knew, for he’d tried. If one of the humans—or Auronae—didn’t find you out, then one of the machines did. And for an inanimate object, Zen was inordinately fond of gossip. But if he were with Vila...

He stared at Vila quite closely, noticing that the lips were moving, but too lazy to listen to the words. He could definitely do worse than Vila, couldn’t he? Rationally, he decided, was the only way to approach a relationship. If he were to get up and walk out of here, what were the benefits? It would make it obvious that he had been too drunk the night before to know what he’d been doing or where he’d been doing it. Hardly an advantage, was it? So... He wouldn’t get involved. With whom? He shot back at himself. His sorry behaviour made it embarrassingly obvious that he was ripe for the picking, and if he weren’t careful, he’d end up doing something he really regretted. Such as trying to embezzle enough money to persuade Anna to leave her husband and come to live with him. And far from making them rich enough that they could move so far away that not even Councillor Chesku and his cronies could hurt them, he’d got her killed. Nastily... But if he were to walk from here, it could very well be right into Blake’s arms. Which would be a nightmare. He’d never retain his independence if it were Blake he was fighting. But Vila, now, Vila... Vila would happily let Avon lead, would happily accept Avon’s strictures and structures for the relationship. And he'd be willing to accept sex without ties, without any of those awkward emotional entanglements that always ended up being tied at the other end to nothing but pain and grief.

All right, he thought, so we’ve established that the only benefit to leaving Vila is that I could salvage some of my pride, but only on a short term basis, until Blake noticed—or remembered—how terribly, frighteningly attracted I am to him. And the advantages? Sex, obviously. Vila staring at me with adoration and admiration—this latter reason being the direct result of Avon’s complete lack of false modesty. Vila’s sarcasm and comments, the brightness of his personality. And Blake being convinced that if I’m with Vila, then anything he thought he remembered from last night was nothing more than the booze talking. And sex. There’d be so much sex, he thought, eyes going dreamy, as his body began to wake up, to recognise that it was morning, his cock filling, his balls growing heavy with expectancy.
“Vila,” he said, breaking in to what Vila was quite proudly considering a masterpiece in the fine art of sarcasm, “shut up.”

“Shut up? Shut up, he says. I’ll shut you up, you Alpha prick. You can just get out—”

“But,” Avon said, rather to his own surprise, not having expected to take the bull by the horns—or single, rather large horn, in Vila’s case—in such an obvious and unsubtle manner, “I haven’t even been in yet.” And his hand touched Vila in a way that would have done the proverbial picture proud.

“You’ve got a cheek—”

“I’ve got two, actually,” Avon said, very cheekily indeed, hands cupping the twin cheeks of Vila’s arse. “And they really are quite nice.”

“Get your hands off, you—”

“It’s not my hands I’m interested in getting off,” he murmured wickedly, his hands doing wonderful things to Vila’s rump, thoroughly enjoying this unsophisticated, unvarnished build-up to sex.

“Well, you can just look elsewhere—”

“Why, when the view here is so attractive?”

That stunned Vila, actually succeeding in doing what that worthy’s mother had always declared impossible—knocking him speechless. Avon grinned at him, rather pleased that he had hit on the right thing to say at the right time, despite the fact that his head felt as if it were stuffed with grey cotton wool. It was worth it, really, to pay him compliments, when the result was this endearing little smile and the rosy flush of cheeks—and best of all, the sudden pulse of interest in the cock that Vila was busy pressing into Avon’s belly.

“D’you mean that?” Vila asked, making it obvious that if the answer weren’t ‘yes’, then the question had abruptly become rhetorical.

“When have I ever lied, Vila?” he purred, stroking some of the wonderfully interesting bits that were within reach, smiling as he discovered the fascinating fact that if he stroked just here, just so, then Vila’s cock pressed into him, just here and just so. Perfect, in its own way, all that engorging flesh hardening engrossingly. In fact, he was so engrossed in it that he almost missed Vila’s answer.

“Not half as often as I’ve done.”

But before he could grab the fact, his mouth was full of Vila and there were hands touching him with an exquisite expertise that quite took his breath away—which was no mean feat, considering that Vila was sucking him dry. But in the wrong place. “Stop that, stupid,” he said, pulling back with some difficulty and more than a bit of mutual reluctance, “don’t waste all your energy on my mouth. There’s another part of me,” and his hand took Vila’s, his cock filling Vila’s palm, “that would appreciate it even more.”

He put his hand on the back of Vila’s neck, pushing him downwards, lower and lower, so slowly, drawing out the anticipation, until he could hear Vila’s sigh and feel the soughing delicacy of Vila’s breath on his cock. Then, shockingly, he was engulfed, sucked into a throat that was swallowing him all the way. Vila’s face buried in his groin, so warmly. He was clutching at Vila, holding him so tightly, squirming with delight and the spiralling sweetness of lust. Vila shrugged him off, pulling back to suckle the tip of his cock, licking at him, nibbling him, sliding foreskin back and forth in taut pleasure. Then he was being sucked again, and he didn’t care that he was muttering Vila’s name over and over, didn’t care that he was showing more vulnerability to this man than he had shown even his Anna. Didn’t care about anything, save the indescribable pleasure Vila was giving him. His back was arching, his balls coiling up tight to his cock, the ecstasy climbing up his spine, taking him higher and higher and higher and all he could feel was Vila sucking him and Vila’s hands on his nipples and squeezing his flesh. Then his own voice went hoarse, rasping out Vila’s name as a finger probed him, pressing inside him, finding his prostate, pressing home and sending him sky-rocketing over the edge. His fingers tangled in the softness of thinning brown hair, tugging at it with the convulsions of his pleasure. He felt his seed shoot from him into the furrow of Vila’s throat, felt Vila swallow, swallow him down, taking him in to be part of Vila and then...
silence from his bedmate. Vila was sitting up on his knees, cock a rampant sentinel rising up from between his thighs as if to guard the softness of the belly. Hard cock, tremors of tightly-packed desire, but fear, oh such fear and such pain in those eyes. And would I have ended up looking at Blake like that, Avon thought. Would I have ended up feeling as if I were nothing more than an acolyte at an altar or a pathetic worshipper at the feet of the big, straight man?

“What about me?” Vila was asking, cock weeping whilst his eyes stayed dry. “What about me?”

“Well now, you are only a Delta,” Avon began, seeing as every word hammered into Vila like a nail, whilst a part of him regarded this much power with curiosity. “And one shouldn’t expect a mere Delta to know this, but the saying is,” and he smiled, letting all his charm and affection and reciprocal desire show, throwing Blake and repercussions out the window with a fine disregard for reality, “if at first you don’t succeed—”

“Then,” said Vila, and Avon smiled as his favourite idiot bounced across the bed towards him and sighed as Avon wrapped him in his arms and let him begin to thrust them together, beginning the rebuilding of lust, “try, try again.”

And they did, even though they got it right on the first attempt. And later, much, much later, when he finally awoke in a room that was redolent with their spent passion, Avon realised that he not only knew what he had done, but that he was absolutely positive that he should have.