

# REVOLUTION



*Beatlemaniacs rev up your brains. The rest of you dig out John Lennon's Revolution. Any version will do; the Scot wrote with both the fast and slow ones in mind. Next, read this story and see how the song's lyrics so neatly describe Blake and Avon's 'discussion'...*



“SO YOU SAY YOU want a revolution,” Avon started the endless argument

again, tone as soothing as nails scraping across slate. “And what’s more, you not only expect us to believe you, but you expect me to *follow* you.”

Blake, seating himself with conspicuous ease, looked up from the sofa to stare, apparently mildly, at Avon. His voice was milder still, none of which succeeded in concealing the banked anger. “If you don’t think I want a revolution, then what do you think I’m risking my life for?”

“Not only your life, Blake. However,” and Avon’s smile was exceedingly charming, his eyes dark and flinty, “we’ll leave that for the moment. We were discussing what you claim is your revolution and which I—” he paused, timing perfect.

Not waiting for Avon’s artful timing, Blake leapt in. “Which you think is some scheme for self-aggrandisement, isn’t that it, Avon?”

“You don’t want a revolution, Blake. All you want is a changing of the guard. With you as despot at its core.”

“Despot?” Still mild, still keeping everything locked silently inside, doubts and fears given not a word. “Hardly that.”

All caged energy, Avon paced once round the small room they used as a galley, stopping the other side of the table whence he could glower down on Blake. “But of course you would think that a benign despot is good for the Universe. A Galactic father-figure, taking care of us all—”

“Giving us the freedom to grow up,” Blake replied sharply. “Anyway,” he added dismissively, idly picking up one of the pieces of Cally and Vila’s endless boring games, “it’s the natural progression of every species, a social evolution—”

“Yes, well, we all want to change the world. Although most of us grow out of that particularly infantile fantasy.”

“And move on to more grown-up fantasies?” Blake enquired quite pleasantly, going for the jugular. “Such as pulling off the greatest bank embezzlement in history?”

“Ah, but that wasn’t a fantasy. It was a success—”

“You were caught!”

Avon gave him a sour look for that, hid it behind his customary disdain. “I said the embezzlement was a success. The escape wasn’t even mentioned.”

“Rather like this dark lady of yours.” Almost lazily, Blake watched the effect of that on Avon, measuring just how deeply Avon was affected, and more importantly, how guiltily Avon started. “You know,” he prodded, “the one I wouldn’t understand about.”

“As you wouldn’t understand, there hardly seems any reason to discuss her,” Avon snapped back. “Of course, you don’t seem to understand about Star One either, but there,” he smiled, “I live in hope.”

“You and hope—now there’s an oxymoron.”

“Actually, no, that’s Vila.”

“All hot air and stupidity?”

“No, that’s *you*.”

"If you think that of me," Blake said very quietly, leaning across the table, "then why are you so quick to follow my every lead?"

"If I'm so quick to follow your every lead, then why am I sitting here trying to talk some sense into your thick skull about Star One?"

"Is that what you're doing? And I thought I was just indulging you in your usual pouting."

Baring his teeth in a caricature of his smile: "Which is probably what you say to Jenna when she tries to talk sense to you."

"Don't forget Cally."

"Cally doesn't argue. She's as gung-ho to blow things up as you are."

"This is not," Blake said with strained control, "a school prank. Destroying Star One is a serious decision, a major move—"

"It is mindless, useless destruction and you can count me out."

Blake stared at him, willing Avon to bend to his will in this. "In."

"Out. No, I have gone along with you on some of your less hare-brained schemes, but this—oh, this time, Blake, I am out."

An explosion of tension held too long at bay, and Blake was on his feet, pacing round the galley, the small room made smaller by the tumult of his emotion. "Don't you know it's going to be all right?"

"All right? All right? Turning space lanes into unsupervised death-traps, throwing controlled climates into natural disasters, killing what Orac estimates will be at least one hundred billion people?" Coming up behind Blake now, forcing him round, grabbing him by the upper arms, and coming as close to shaking him as Kerr Avon would ever permit himself. "A hundred billion people, dead, killed because of your whim."

"Do you think I don't know that? Do you think Orac didn't tell me the same thing? Oh, I know how many people might—*might*—die, Avon, but don't you see? They might die now, but look how many people will be free."

Avon did shake him then. "Will you stop for just a moment and *think*? A hundred billion, Blake. That's a number greater than any of us can conceive as anything but a meaningless statistic. But you're willing to kill all of them—and for what?"

The moment stretched out between them, fractious and fragile, until Blake shrugged Avon off, walked away from him. His back to this most

unexpected conscience, Blake said, his hard-earned cynicism of Avon's motives heavy in his voice, his disbelief of Avon's motivation conspicuously sarcastic: "I'm impressed by your altruism. I don't believe it for a minute, of course, but it is an impressive display."

"There's no need to be so insulting—altruism has nothing to do with it?"

"Oh, absolutely," Blake sneered, turning round so that Avon could see the condescension of his smile.

"I will kill," Avon said clearly, "when necessary. I will kill with my bare hands, if need be, or I'll set a bomb to kill someone later. When necessary. But I refuse to kill a hundred billion people for the sake of your overinflated ego."

"And would you kill them to save yourself, Avon?"

"I already have the Federation and the Terra Nostra after me, killing half the Galaxy would certainly make travel in the other half more interesting than I would care for."

"So it's the consequences of it, then." Blake looked Avon up and down, from the sheen of his hair to the shine of his boots, and then dismissed him with a sneer that even Avon would be hard-pressed to better. "Don't worry. I'll take full responsibility. The blood will be on my hands."

"How very generous of you. But you'll forgive me if I refuse your kind offer."

"Oh, Avon, there's nothing kind about my decision."

Enough despair in that to make even Avon look twice, and reconsider. "Why the hell are you doing this?"

"Because," a heavy sigh that sounded convincing, and which Avon was annoyed to find he believed, "it's necessary. You said you can kill with your bare hands, when necessary. Very tidy, nice and easy, that. But I'm trying to overthrow the most oppressive, most predatory régime humanity has ever known. And I don't have your luxury of being fastidious."

"Lofty ideals. Pity the execution is so tawdry. And as for necessary—Blake, it isn't even a good idea."

"And I suppose you have it all worked out?"

"Naturally."

"Then let's not keep it all to yourself. Go on, Avon," and now Blake was right in front of Avon again, staring down at him, using every millimetre

of height and girth that he had, “tell me your brilliant plan to save the Universe.”

“Whether it saves the Universe or not is moot, but my plan—which *is* brilliant—will at least save my skin, and quite frankly, that’s all that really matters.”

“Ever the humanitarian. Go on, Avon, tell me this brilliant plan of yours.”

“We reach Star One. We take it over, we take control of the computers, I reprogramme where necessary and—”

“Voilà, the Federation throw themselves on their collective swords and Lord Avon is hailed by the masses.”

“Not quite,” Avon replied tightly. “I was rather hoping for a more anonymous rôle in this fiasco.”

“You surprise me, Avon. From brilliant plan to fiasco in less than a minute.” He gazed levelly at Avon, watching the moment when his words hit home. “You used to last longer. With me.”

“That subject,” Avon replied icily, bitter frost coating every word, “is closed. Finished, over and done with. And I’m not here to discuss a momentary insanity in my past, I’m here to stop you from destroying Star One. End of topic.”

Blake gave him an avuncular smile, the sort designed to hide Blake’s own reactions whilst egging Avon into losing some of his *sang froid*. “Back to the safe topic of politics, then. And I say: we are going to destroy Star One. End of topic.”

“Why? Taking control of Star One is the perfect opportunity to defeat the Federation once and for all—”

“And at what cost?”

“Something considerably less than a hundred billion lives.”

“Altruism again, Avon? You really ought to watch that. A man might imagine you had a heart after all.”

“Common sense and intelligence, Blake. Think with your head instead of that great bleeding heart of yours. Control of Star One, and you control everything from the Home Worlds to the Outer Planets.”

“And who will control me?” Fierce, demanding whisper, Blake’s eyes a torment of doubts and self-fears. “Can your common sense and intelligence tell me that, Avon?”

“Do you think the masses really care who holds the reigns as long as their bellies are full and their minds happily empty? Leave them with the illusion

of freedom while taking all their difficult decisions for them, and they will hosanna you from one end of the Galaxy to the next. And all that will be required of you,” he stopped for a moment, looking at Blake in what could have been love or hate, “is to carry on as usual.”

“That’s no answer, that’s an invitation to turn into a monster worse than Servalan.”

Avon seated himself, chair pushed away from table, boots thumping down insolently close to Blake’s glass. “All right, so you reject the only reasonable course of action out of yet more misguided idealism. But all you have to offer in its place is more senseless destruction and meaningless murder.”

“I have a real solution—”

“And we’d all love to hear the plan.”

“So that you can shoot it down the way you shoot down troopers unfortunate enough to get in your way?”

“Ah, yes, but I was only following orders—” A raising of eyebrows, an expression that would have been ingenuous on a face less roué than Avon’s, “—and wasn’t that what you’ve always wanted?”

“What I want,” Blake said, dropping the sparing, coming round the table to lean, one hand on the table top, one hand on the back of Avon’s chair, all of him canopying the other man, “is for your help. For a genuine contribution—”

“Well, we’re all doing what we can,” delivered with fine sarcasm and sharp contempt. “But if you want money,” Avon replied, willfully misunderstanding, extricating himself with a fastidious, insulting moue, “for Shertan and Avalon and all the others with minds so full of hate they have no room left for a single rational thought, then I’m sorry,” he was clinking bottle and glass, his usual tittle exchanged in favour of a Vila-sized drink, “I’m afraid you’ll just have to wait.”

“Don’t pretend stupidity, Avon. Not when it looks so natural on you.”

“A comment worthy of the schoolroom,” Avon replied, refusing to give Blake the pleasure of his reaction, and refusing to yield to the craven impulse to wash his hands of this whole disaster.

“Why don’t you leave?” Blake asked from too close behind him.

“I thought Cally was supposed to be the alien telepath on this ship,” Avon murmured to himself, going back to the table, if only because that would get Blake literally off his back, the other man’s

presence an eternal temptation and constant reminder. “I don’t leave,” he said clearly, “because the nearest inhabitable planet is a quite a walk from here.”

“In other words, you can’t finagle the computers into giving you complete override.”

Avon was smiling urbanely now, his preternatural equanimity the only sign of the emotions roiling inside. “Either that, or I have a healthy respect for a pilot scorned and a guerrilla foiled.”

That caught Blake unexpectedly, making him grin, rekindling the amity they had once come so painfully close to having. “Yes, they would murder you in your bed, wouldn’t they?” An uneasy shift in ambience then, two men of capricious and dangerous moods in a world even more fickle, their relationship an endless *moiré*. “Or put your back out at least.”

“Really, Blake, must you wallow in your ‘man of the people’ role quite so much?”

“It wasn’t a pose before, when you and I had sex.”

“I’ve already warned you about that. The subject of you and I fucking is closed.”

“Fucking? What, no coy euphemisms, Avon?”

“What did you expect?” Avon turned his voice into a sneer. “Making love?”

“I wouldn’t turn down a little human warmth right now.”

The courage of that quiet statement took Avon aback, and took him back to the beginning, when the two of them had fostered foolish notions that they might one day be friends, that they could share sex and company without ripping the heart out of the other. “Then I suggest you visit one of your little camp followers. Sycophancy is about all the human warmth you can deal with.”

“Which implies that you offered me more.” No response to that, not that Blake had expected Avon to offer his heart on a silver platter. “Did you offer me more, Avon? Is that what you’re saying?”

“I’m saying if I had it all to do over again,” hauling back from Blake’s implications of Avon having once felt more than merest lust for Blake, “you are the last person I would fuck.”

“Regrets, Avon?” Blake murmured into the chinks of Avon’s armour.

Avon looked at him pointedly, raised an eyebrow dismissively. “Only a small one.”

Blake threw back his head and laughed, the sound too loud for the room, and all the more

unexpected for its rarity over too long a time. “Oh, Avon, Avon, you had better be careful. Your desperation is showing.”

“Don’t be absurd.” A pause, an expression of surprise, as if he had just thought of this: “Why am I asking for the impossible?”

“Because, Avon,” Blake said harshly, moving in so close to Avon that the other man couldn’t take a deep breath without brushing their chests one against the other, “you still have hopes and dreams, in spite of yourself.”

“Now who’s speaking about the impossible.”

“Neither one of us. Why the hell can’t you admit that there are some things you dream of—and that *that* is the reason you’re still here with me.”

“Your petty excuse of a Revolution? Blake, for all I care, the mindless millions can live the lives of serfs or of drugged zombies, as long as I am free to live as I choose.”

“So much for your concern for the hundred billion my plan calls for.”

Avon could make amorality seem utterly charming. “I told you not to accuse me of altruism.”

“Then I was right. You want Star One for the power—”

“No. I want Star One because then the Federation will be finished, and I will have enough resources that no one and nothing can touch me.”

“No man is an island, Avon.”

“Although you do a very good impersonation of a lump of rock. When it comes to thinking.”

“Why do you refuse to see? Star One is absolute power, and—”

“Yes, yes, I’ve had a classical education, I know the rest of that sorry quote, there’s no need for you to repeat it yet again. You’re so proud of your idealism and your humanitarianism, and yet you’re as sure as I am that you would turn into a despot the moment you got your bloody hands on the controls. In that, at least, we are in complete agreement. But when all is said and done, what does it matter to the average citizen, whether it’s you or the Council in control?”

“It matters to *me*. People were meant to be free—”

“You seem so very certain of that, and with an absolute lack of evidence. Pure faith, Blake. Blind faith, and for that, you want to destroy half the galaxy.”

“I don’t want to destroy anything. But Star One has to be eliminated—”

“Put temptation from thee? Do you know *that* classical quote as well?”

“I know,” and by now, Blake’s temper, in league with his doubts and his fears and the horrible truths Avon so lightly bandied about, was threatening to defeat him, “that if we don’t destroy Star One, if I don’t at least give the people a chance of freedom—then all this will have been for nothing. Futile, meaningless—”

“Don’t forget pointless, useless, wasteful—counter-productive.”

Blake allowed the words to die away, stood there looking at Avon, until the other man glanced away, looked back once more at Blake. “Do you really hate me so?” Blake asked softly.

“Can’t you tell?” Avon asked just as softly, although there was a hardness to his eyes and the set of his jaw.

“Sometimes... Sometimes I think you might love me.”

“When you’re sound asleep and dreaming, presumably. Either that or hallucinating as a result of your delusions of grandeur.”

“Because you look at me, sometimes... Because you hover around me—”

“Like a moth round a flame, fascinated by what’s going to ultimately be the death of me. That’s the sum total of my fascination with you.”

“Do you really believe I’ll get you killed?”

“Do you really believe you’ll do anything else? A hundred billion—what’s one more amongst so many?”

“But it’s different with you.”

“Only because you have a face to go with the statistic.”

“No. Because you and I—” Blake swallowed, almost reached out to caress Avon, in memory of what had been and as talisman against the deaths that were yet to come. “Because you and I, if we had met differently...”

“Would still be at each other’s throats, jockeying for position.”

“Why won’t you admit it?”

“First dreams and hopes, and now love,” Avon tut-tutted as if he honestly didn’t care, giving lie to the fears that lurked behind the ire. “You really are fond of the impossible, aren’t you?”

“But I wasn’t the one who mentioned love—and it wasn’t impossible. Not in the beginning.”

“Don’t confuse rutting sex with the so-called finer emotions,” Avon snapped, finally giving in

enough to step backwards away from Blake only to end up against the wall. “The only thing they have in common is the temporary suspension of rational thought followed by periods of regret. Rather serious, in some cases.”

More than Avon was wont to admit, that last comment shed light on what Blake hoped had been true all along, that Avon regretted their failed relationship as much as Blake himself did, that the sex had held the promise of much more than venal satisfaction. Intent on recapturing the recent past that might not be as dead as he had thought, Blake stepped forward, took Avon’s chin in his hand, holding him firmly, knowing perfectly well that Avon would never humiliate himself by struggling to free himself, not when Blake would win this particular skirmish, Avon’s attempted façade of distant disinclination fooling him not one whit. “Then what we had,” Blake eventually said with utter certainty and the depths of regret, “wasn’t just fucking.”

“Don’t be stupid, of course it was just sex. And while we’re waiting for that to penetrate the sarcophagus of your skull, let me go.”

“Why?” Blake asked, ignoring Avon’s protests, seeing instead the unwilling, struggling compliance in Avon’s eyes, remembering times not so long distant when he and Avon had met in kindred hunger. “If you wanted me to let you go, you would have left *Liberator* long ago.”

“Leave the ship that is as much mine as yours? Not a chance. And I won’t say it again. Let. Me. Go.”

Blake wasn’t smiling, his eyes darkening as he closed the small distance between his mouth and Avon’s. “No,” he murmured, breath warm against Avon’s lips, thumb caressing Avon’s cheek.

“Then don’t say I didn’t warn you—”

Avon brought his knee up, but Blake knew him, had twisted aside, the two of them scuffling, Blake parrying every dirty move Avon made, Avon pulling more punches than he would ever want to admit. The mortality he carried around within him was alive and kicking, reminding him of what today, or tomorrow, or the day after would bring. Reminding him that it could well be more than just this intolerable ensnarement that would be over and finished. Blake would be gone: changed forever, as good as dead, if not physically dead. And Avon himself—he dodged a glancing blow, one that was designed to tame and not to hurt, felt

the heat of Blake's body against his, felt the adrenalin pounding through both of them until he couldn't tell where anger and hate left off and lust and desire began—Avon himself felt the atavistic shiver of premonition, the irrational fear that screamed that it would all be over, and that there would be nothing but void left behind.

They lurched against each other, each one pulling the other close, battle as disguise for passion, struggle as ruse for closeness, each one wrestling the other until they were plastered together, arms straining tightly around the other, their breaths commingling, this fight their excuse for the need neither one of them would admit in himself, blaming the rising heat of lust on the other. Blake's mouth on Avon's neck, his words a sibilant whisper kissing Avon's flesh. "Don't you know? It'll be all right."

Avon's hands inside Blake's shirt, fingers twisting nipples, Blake groaning, rubbing his groin harder against Avon. "Will it?" Avon demanded. "All right? How can it ever be all right between us?"

Blake stared at eyes that were gimlet sharp, piercing him with knowledge Blake did not want: he had demons enough of his own. "Accept me, let me—"

Avon turned the words aside, refused the offer before it could be made, rejecting any more hurt at Blake's hands, refusing to allow this to go beyond meaningless sex, needing to prove to himself and Blake that he didn't love Blake, didn't need Blake, didn't see him as anything more than a convenient cock. "Fuck me," he demanded, hands wrenching Blake's clothes open, too-strong hands grabbing Blake's cock and pulling it free from his clothes, not painful enough to do anything but inflame Blake even more, Avon's hunger and Avon's strength a potent lure. "Fuck me," Avon demanded again, his hands full of Blake's cock, his mouth biting on the exposed skin of Blake's shoulder.

"Not just fucking—"

"It's that," Avon sweetly squeezed Blake's cock, rubbing his thumb along the slit the way that had always made Blake tremble, "or nothing at all."

"In that case," Blake had to stop to gather his breath, Avon sucking on his nipple and pulling on his cock more than he could control, "you can call it whatever the fuck you like."

But Blake would know the truth, even if Avon never would, or never could. Hurriedly, driven by

passion and the dread that Avon would come to his senses and stop this, Blake fumbled with Avon's clothes, fighting his way through leather and fabric and fasteners, coming at last to the silken heat of Avon, exposed and hard and haughty in his hand. "Oh, yes," he sighed as he matched the movements of Avon's hand on his own flesh, "you love it like this, don't you?"

"Get on with it," hissed at him, intended probably to sound supercilious and cruel, but revealing all the pent lust and unadmitted emotions that had been within Avon from the start.

"Like this?" Blake asked, shoving Avon's trousers down his thighs, the leather catching on the dark hair, Avon's cock bobbing redly against the whiteness of his belly. Another struggle, this time with no pretence of battle with anything but recalcitrant clothing, mouths and hands frantic on every atom they could reach, Blake's hands finally settling on Avon's buttocks, fingertips pressing against the opening of Avon's body. "How do you want it?" Blake asked breathlessly, rubbing his cock against Avon's, the flesh bumping and sliding with the slickness of precum.

"Do I have to tell you even that? So much for our little fling being unforgettable."

"I haven't forgotten," Blake snapped back, the anger coming back that Avon was turning this into a cheap, tasteless encounter, something less than even the honest transaction between prostitute and customer, a sickening feeling beginning that Avon had demanded a price Blake couldn't pay. "The question though," he pressed one finger, hard, into Avon's arse, grinning bitterly as Avon's eyes fell closed and his mouth fell open, soundless, silent passion, "is do you want it the way we began, or the way we finished? With you wrapped around me, looking at me—"

"Shut up," Avon hissed. "Just shut up. Come on, Blake, can't you even fuck any more? Go on, do it, fuck me—"

And Blake knew what Avon was doing, understood Avon's need to deny the tentative threads of love that had turned into something so close to hate. Knew that turning it into the mindless rutting of Avon's claims would sully the past beyond all hope of redemption, a retroactive truth. "Oh, no," Blake said, finger moving inside Avon, stroking him where Avon was most tender, making Avon vulnerable in pleasure. "It's more than that, always has been—"

And he kissed Avon, lips soft against Avon's, tongue sliding wetly into Avon's opened mouth. Took the groan that bled Avon's pain into himself, following as Avon moved so that the table was at his back, followed once more as Avon lowered himself, Blake withdrawing from his body only with the greatest reluctance. Kissed Avon again, not yielding this tenderness for fear of what would be unleashed, lifted the other man's legs up, Avon co-operating, his back on the table, his arse lush in Blake's hands, Avon's hands in Blake's hair, clinging on, mouth demanding, arse hungry, widening easily at the first pressure of Blake's cock. Avon wasn't tight, must have been fucking Vila, or using a dildo, and the errant thought lodged in Blake's brain: I wonder if he thought of me...

And then he was inside Avon, hot, moist inner flesh taking him in, more, more, until all of him was inside, and he couldn't help but move, fucking Avon as Avon had demanded, their mouths separate, their bodies conjoined, moving in desperately remembered rhythm. Avon's eyes were closed, shutting Blake out, as he had at the beginning, as he was, now, at the finish.

The thought shattered through Blake, and he poured himself into loving Avon, into making this more than even Avon could deny, trying to transform this into what it had never, truly, been. He suckled wetly on Avon's nipples, smoothed Avon's precum over his cock, dandled his balls, pressed the skin shining tight, rubbed Avon's cock in the coarseness of Blake's own pubic hair, fucked him all the harder, until Avon was thrusting back onto Blake's cock, raising himself so that Blake was in him deeper, deeper, Avon wrapping himself round Blake, the barriers down now, the lies as forgotten as dust, Avon's voice a hoarse litany of praise and pleasure, triumph and joy coursing through Blake at the sound and the sight of him.

All around Blake, Avon's body was spasming, helpless in orgasm, belly muscles rippling, arms too tightly round Blake, arse contracting, Blake holding himself perfectly still inside Avon as the other man succumbed, releasing himself to pleasure, cum erupting from him, wetness on Blake's belly, Avon replete in his arms. Then, with Avon limp and pliant, Blake gave himself over to his own pleasure, feasting his eyes on a sated Avon as his body feasted itself on Avon's inner heat, his heart pounding as he pounded into Avon's body. Almost

there, and he leaned down to kiss Avon again.

Avon turned the other cheek, a profoundly uncharitable act, and closed his eyes, denying Blake anything but physical pleasure, denying what had happened while his cum was still wet on Blake's belly.

"Avon," Blake gasped, unable to stop either his words or the needs of his body, "don't."

"Get on with it."

Gritting his teeth, Blake stilled his body, deep in Avon's heat. "You love me," Blake said, knowing it to be true.

"And you're a fucking fool," Avon hissed, meaning it, twisting himself free of Blake's body, sparing a contemptuous glare for the erect symbol of the illusion he had so nearly believed.

Quivering with pain and the misery of his body, Blake shouted. "You love me."

Avon didn't even deign to look at Blake as he said it, the words still hurled with unerring, poisonous accuracy: "I *hate* you."

And with the light glinting on Avon's skin as it disappeared beneath the all-concealing leather, Blake came joylessly into his own fist, Avon's lie still ringing in his ears.

Embarrassment now, and humiliation, Blake struggling to refasten trousers and shirt with fingers that trembled, one sticky hand wiped surreptitiously, bitterly, on rough fabric. Silence for some moments, underscored by the soft sounds of leather creaking against leather as Avon pulled on his boots, and Blake's ragged breath slowly coming back under his control.

"So I was wrong, was I?" Blake asked, thinking about the past, about the words murmured in the extremity of the moment, Avon's body tight round him. "Wrong about how you feel?"

"Oh, Blake," Avon's smile was his cruellest, sharp enough to draw blood, "you have no idea how wrong you are."

"I don't believe that—"

"I didn't expect you to. You have, after all, a considerable problem with the truth."

"Only when you ask me to pretend that everything I know is true is nothing but base lies."

"Base. Yes, back to Star One already. So much for passion." Going on before Blake could voice the protest thundering in readiness: "You said you would change the Constitution—"

"Is that how this is going to be, Avon? Wiping the slate clean as if it never happened?"

“As if what never happened?” Avon asked sweetly, his eyes darting involuntarily to Blake’s hand, the one that had held Avon safe and sensual in its palm, the one that had been unhappy haven for Blake himself.

“What we just did. What you tried so desperately to turn into fucking—”

“Wasn’t it fucking?” Avon asked, the perfect picture of incomprehension, never a convincing expression on his face. “Oh, well, of course, I suppose for you it was just another masturbatory session. Rather like your so-called planning conferences with the rest of us. Change the Constitution!” he sneered. “The only thing I want to change is your head. Get you a new one with a brain in it.”

“At least I have a heart.”

For one unguarded moment, it showed, all of it, on Avon’s face, every ounce of confusion and chaos and misery, so much that Blake realised that he could never comprehend Avon—doubted that Avon even knew himself, and then Avon was back to his usual self, dark eyes glittering.

“And once you’ve changed this Constitution—how long do you think it will be before the military regroups and sends you the way of Star One?”

“It’s not the people,” Blake replied, staring at this man he had just fucked, whose sex he could still smell in the air, the man who had tormented him with love and rewarded him with hate.

“It’s not the people?” Avon prompted politely, when Blake had stood staring at him far too long for comfort. “If it’s not the people,” he went on, scrubbing his hands with skin cleanser over the sink unit, “then what is it?”

“It’s the institution. The status quo is the enemy,” Blake said.

Avon, never a fool in anything but the realms of the heart, knew what Blake was getting at, rejecting it as thoroughly as he rejected the dangerous appeal of loving Blake, of being loved—no, once had been enough, and Blake had come along on Anna’s heels like a comet, threatening to burn them both to cinders. Avon wanted none of that, wanted no more of this emotional fiefdom to Blake. Wanted nothing more than to have this over, and to have Blake consigned to the past where he belonged, for with him there, Avon could feel himself safe once more.

“Spoken like a true revolutionary,” Avon said drily, forcing all the passion aside, bringing his anger to the fore where it would hide all the other,

less acceptable emotions. “But if after all this, you go around carrying pictures of Star One and the starving millions left behind, well, you won’t make it far anyway.”

“I can make it to Earth, and restore order there first.”

“And only last week you were vilifying the Domes. My, my, you are a fickle fellow.”

“If you would stop being such a coward, you’d find out I’m not fickle at all.”

“It’s all right, you don’t have to cajole me with slurs of cowardice, I’ll help you with Star One.”

“That’s not what—”

“You mean you don’t want my help after all?”

Poised on the sword edge of Avon’s dilemma, that one small sentence forcing him to choose between the Cause that gave meaning to his life and the slim hope that Avon might one day permit something more than armed neutrality. For a long time, they looked at each other, Avon almost smiling, Blake chewing on his thumb-nail, neither one of them willing to give an inch unless it was to hang Blake or leash Avon.

“Well? What’s it to be, Blake? Do you want my help with Star One or not?”

“Only Star One?”

“It’s all you’re going to get.”

No. Unacceptable, not with the fading echoes of Avon saying those things to him, words that could only mean that somewhere under it all, Avon harboured love for him. Somewhere under what might not be hate at all. I hate you, Avon had said, and Blake had known it for the pathetic lie it was.

“After Star One, you’ll come with me to Earth—”

“And then it will be over and done with.”

Blake would not answer that, would not add his own lies to Avon’s.

“Oh, don’t look like that,” Avon jeered, going over to the door as if nothing at all had happened between them. “Don’t you know? It’s going to be all right.”

“And you’ll be free.”

At the door, Avon stopped for a moment, looked back once. “As free of you as I’ll ever be.”

And Blake felt a flutter of hope and of fear as he heard the unwitting challenge in that, heard the unspoken admission that Avon was tied to him, chained by more than mere necessity. Heard again what Avon had said with Blake deep inside him, remembered the touch of Avon’s tongue against

his, the fire in Avon that had flared, as always, as soon as they had touched each other.

A challenge, then, of the sort only Avon would issue.

Remembering the way Avon had said 'I hate

you', remembering how sweet it had been before Avon's fears had turned emotion to venom, Blake sat there for a long time. "All right, Avon," he finally murmured, going out to find Avon and rejoin the battle once more, "all right."

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