

THE GHOSTS OF GAUDA PRIME

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The man who came into his assigned apartment, the one he was told he would be partnered with, the one who would sleep in the second bunk in the modest two-room abode, looked strangely familiar. It was the black outfit with the silver belt. Yes, that was it. Or perhaps it was the man’s build, narrow hips and proud shoulders. Or the way the man’s brown hair brushed his forehead and neck with deeper, golder tones. Or the way his eyes reflected a chill from a manner he just couldn’t quite place.

But no matter. Memory had never been his best attribute. Events and experiences slipped from his mind as easily as water slipped over river rocks down a mossy fall. He held out his hand. “The name’s Blake. Roj Blake.”

The stranger unshouldered a heavy pack, set it on the left bunk, and said, “Avon.” He did not hold out his hand.

Something echoed in Blake’s mind. Avon...Avon...Avon. He had heard that somewhere before, hadn’t he? “Have we met?”

“Before?” Avon turned, plying him with a squinty look. “I don’t think so.”

“I was thinking maybe we worked together in the past.”

“I’m a technician. I usually work alone.”

“I’m schooled in engineering myself.” The mouth. Yes. That was something he could almost know, lips thinner now, but how they could swell with passion. He shook his head. That thought had come from nowhere, made little sense to him. He did not remember any passionate affairs in recent history, or at all. And yet, this man reminded him of something that stirred unidentifiable longings. Why? When had something happened that his body remembered but his mind did not?

Blake had been locked into a work contract for the Federation for the past five years, and he had five more to go. It wasn’t torturous work, but he did not have any freedom to leave, to go on to another job, or to save much money since the pay was so bad. He didn’t remember signing on with the Federation. Why he did it was a mystery. Maybe he’d wanted the security. Maybe he thought the medical benefits might help him with his memory problems. At any rate, nothing had changed in five years; his memory remained a sieve; his relationships suffered for it; his loneliness had bloomed to a dark entity that haunted him even in sleep.

So why now did something stir deep inside him where only a dark abyss yawned? What did this man remind him of? How many secrets lay buried in his heart and why should any of them connect to this Avon fellow?

He believed there was no way for him to know.

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This new project for the Federation had them working at opposite ends of a long, gray room populated mostly by mindless mutoids who did the heavier lifting and other routine work that required less thinking. Blake hated the hours, the mutoids, the décor, and the job. It was simply tedious computer work involving calibrations. He had no idea what the bigger project was, nor did he care. The Federation prided itself on its secrecies and intricate hierarchies that liked to think they controlled all under their rule. To Blake it was a sham he didn't care to think about. He preferred to simply do his job and get out. Five more years. What he would do after his work-release he didn't know. But it was something he could look forward to like a reward, an end of a journey, the meeting of a long lost love.

Avon was a quiet companion. He had neat habits and was a more-than-efficient computer expert. Often, while working, Blake would find himself turning around, craning his neck to get a glimpse beyond the consoles of the subdued, brown-eyed man. He would catch himself staring, breath held, muscles tensing in some kind of an automatic reaction, then shake his head and go back to work wondering what it was he thought he'd seen, or felt, or sensed.

They took their lunches at different times, so there were few opportunities on the job for Blake to get to know his apartment mate. Often, Avon stayed late on the job because he didn't want to leave something he was in the middle of. Blake admired the tenacity of the man, and his loyalty, though he felt none of his own. He didn't care about his work at all, only the security it offered, and the hope that the on-base hospital might come up with some new twist to help him with his memory problems. That was all. He had no ties to this place or any other place in the galaxy. He was adrift, and preferred it that way. And when quitting time came, he left whether he was in the middle of a calibration or not.

What extra money he had he spent at a local diner-bar. Sometimes he would rent a holo-show on a private screen in the dream booths in the center of the base complex, but most of the time he'd sit and chat with acquaintances in the bar, drinking beer and trying not to think about the sieve mind of his that made him aimless, dreamless, undriven. There was a hole in his soul. He could feel it like a knife he could not dislodge, and on the nights it was the worst he would get deliberately drunk and float on the false euphoria of alcohol until work the next day forced him to get up and take on the responsible and ethical persona of a man who had nothing else to live for.

This evening was heading in the direction of being one of those nights. The knife inside him ached. The day had been filled with irritations: little mistakes he'd made that set him

back, mutoids bickering all afternoon about some nonsensical topic of reorganization of supplies (who cared if the instruments and computers he and Avon used were stored alphabetically or according to size?) and the all-encompassing, intense feeling Blake had that Avon's presence was more than just another working entity shifting around in the shadowy background.

Blake glanced at his computer clock, saw the day was over, and stood stretching long muscles that had cramped up during the afternoon. Stiff and tense, Blake sighed aloud. He ran a hand through his curly hair feeling it snag and pull. His bladder was full, a dull pressure, and he was hungry.

He turned to face the far end of the room, gaze searching past the black and white sea of mutoid, undead bodies to find Avon looking in his direction.

Blake's muscles tensed. His head skipped. Strange. There was no reason for that reaction. He forced himself to smile, to walk toward the uniquely familiar yet unfamiliar man.

They had roomed together now for only two weeks, a quiet, mutual respect leaving them still unknown to each other, still strangers. And yet there was this pull. Blake could not ignore it. Somewhere in some time lost to him, he had a recollection of reading about the attraction of souls. The pull, the tug that people felt to another special person had something to do with everyone having a twin in spirit. *I am your third arm, and your second shadow, the white one, whom you cannot accept, and who can never forget you.* It was a partial poem, or perhaps a lyric from a song, but where those lines came from he could not recall. But he felt something like that when he looked at this man.

He and Avon had not gone out together yet. In their rooms they spoke mostly of necessities: what supplies they were low on, if anything needed replacing or fixing, whether or not the laundry was taken away once a week or twice, what days off one or the other had, speculation on the weather conditions outside the dome-base. Make-talk, Blake called it. After two weeks and very little play, they still could not really know each other at all.

Blake sensed a reticence from Avon and respected it. He had never been one, as far as he could remember, to pry into another's personal life background. He himself could offer next to nothing in return save for speculation about himself, and about the memory problems that plagued his life since, he assumed, his childhood.

Now he approached the quieter man whose eyes suddenly darted nervously about the room, whose graceful body looked quite handsome draped in the usual black he wore both on and off the job. The mannerism with the eyes and the broody clothing were illogically charming. Blake shoved his hands deep in his coverall pockets and said, "Care to join me for a meal?"

Avon's brows narrowed. He did not answer right away. The pallor of his skin seemed to gradually darken. Finally, he said, "I really should finish up here. Another hour maybe."

"You don't get paid for it. Leave it here for tomorrow," Blake said.

Avon's eyes circled upward, as if he were looking at something only he could see somewhere in the vicinity of the fluorescent-lit ceiling. "I like to keep busy."

"You can't work all the time."

"Is that why you stare at me sometimes? Trying to figure out why I work so hard?" He played with the cuff of his shirt, not meeting Blake's gaze.

Blake smiled anyway, shaking his head. He hesitated. "It's..." He swallowed hard. "It's not that."

Now Avon raised his face. The look there was questioning, but still guarded.

The bustle of mutoids in the background distracted Blake for a moment. He saw a long tunnel, flashing lights, heard laser-rifle staccatos; the quick memory flashed like a nova, then as quickly it was gone. The smell of ozone drenched him. Like a nightmare. A supernatural experience.

He shook his head, a habit with him, and all but the scent vanished.

"Well?" Avon prompted.

"I have memory problems," Blake began. "The medics call it a sort of random amnesia. It's very rare. I keep thinking I've seen you before, that's all."

"Yes, you indicated so when we first met. Well, then," Avon said, "if that were the case, wouldn't I remember?"

Blake nodded. "That's just it. So it must just be someone else I'm thinking of. Someone who isn't you, and who I'll probably never remember."

Avon frowned. "I'm sure that's it. It's interesting to note, though, that memory problems within the Federation are not at all unusual. Random amnesia, eh? They told you it was rare?" He blinked twice. "It's a veritable plague."

"Where have you heard that?"

Avon shrugged, would not reply. The lips pursed. Again, the familiarity of them was stunning. He could see them part, tremble with an acerbic, perfectly timed verbal barb, or shimmer with the dampness of an exceptionally deep kiss. It was as if Blake were receiving out of context slices of this man's life. The concentration on the lips led to

additional still pictures of Avon in other clothing (red leather, blue prison fatigues,) of Avon bending over him and saying something he could not hear, of Avon shirtless and golden pale, half turned away, head lowered in a shy denial that spoke both vulnerability and danger.

Who could this memory-person be if not the man standing before Blake? Blake took a deep breath, winced at his own confusion, and said, "You're not a telepath, are you?"

"No." The answer was couched in surprise. "You still think you knew me?"

Blake shrugged. "No, I just think I knew someone like you. Very like you. I'm sorry. I don't mean to act crazy like this." He nodded toward the console. "Go back to work, then, all right? I'll see you later at the apartment."

Avon's delicate hands worried his cuff some more. Blake turned away and headed for the exit, nose wrinkling at the left-over ozone of his memory mixed with the smell of blood that always permeated mutoids.

Halfway to the door, Avon's calm voice stopped him. "Well now, I didn't say no, did I? I *am* somewhat hungry. Maybe I will join you after all."

Blake turned, saw the man gracefully tidy up his workspace and turn off his computer. Even from this angle, the familiar sense of *déjà vu*, of knowing this man from before, came on again (and still) strong and hard. The way the shoulders stooped and flexed, the tension in the lower back (yes! didn't the person he used to know have chronic back pain?) the narrow curve of buttock and hip receding to slim, strong thighs. And the way the man lowered his head, revealing a tiny line of white neck between hairline and collar. Who had he known with all these attributes? And were these mental images going to keep on bothering him?

He closed his eyes tightly, trying to banish his unease. Obviously the man he was remembering was no longer in his life, no longer a friend or brother or lover. Whatever he had been, that was over. Blake's mind was only trying to reason it all out when there was really no purpose to it. The past was the past, Blake had learned in the last five years. You couldn't re-grab it even if you wanted to. Time didn't work that way. Life was cold when it came down to it. People died. Relationships ended. Blake was actually quite lucky that his memory was the way it was. He was free from potential pains of the past. Free from mourning. Free, in many ways, from death since no one he'd ever known that he could remember had died.

At dinner, Blake did most of the talking. Avon ate sparsely, but listened attentively. That attentiveness was soothing to Blake. And disturbingly erotic. Again he couldn't help but ask himself: Why be drawn to this man? What did his body want? What could this mean to him?

The fact that Avon was male was not the problem. Blake had no strong affiliations to either gender where sex was concerned. In fact, where sex was concerned, he had few desires. For all he knew, he was still a virgin. He couldn't remember any liaisons with men or women. Nor did he care to remember. On those very rare occasions he felt somewhat randy, he'd rent a dream booth and simply watch the holo-sex shows for awhile, taking more of an interest in the intimacies shared between two people rather than the actual sex act itself, or the focus on genitalia that the cameras seemed to prefer. Sometimes he'd touch himself until the small surge that told him orgasm was achieved came. It was never anything to celebrate, and usually the pleasure was shadowed by an overwhelming awareness of that hole in his soul. Sometimes he'd leave the booth completely unsatisfied and convinced more than ever that he was "missing" something, but what that something was he couldn't know, nor did his body give many clues.

Was it merely curiosity that aroused him, then, with this new man who'd become his roommate? He'd had roommates before and none of them had made any impression. Why was Avon different?

"If you can't wait to leave this place," Avon said, toying with his pudding dessert, "why then would you sign on with the Federation for ten years?"

"That's the problem with random amnesia," Blake replied. "I don't remember. I assume I had a good reason at the time."

"Yet you hate it here." The statement was a flat tone, not accusing, yet somewhat mystified.

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to."

Blake signaled the robo-waiter and ordered a beer.

Avon's mouth turned up in a half-smile. "Planning on getting drunk?"

"It's one pleasure I still have," he replied. "But I can only afford it about once a week."

"Only one pleasure? Pity."

"Will you join me?" Blake asked.

Avon seemed to ponder for a moment, the lips his mind knew too well pressing, the jaw squaring itself in a way that made Blake's heart skip a beat. "Why not?"

Later, they moved to the bar where alien music played and the lights were less severe. In one corner, a loud poker game was going on. Over the bar, on a huge tri-d screen, was a low-grav football game.

“Do you ever gamble?” Avon asked.

“No. I can barely afford my drinks. Why, do you?”

“Only if I’m sure I’ll win.” That smile, those pearly teeth. Even that tongue. How could Blake think he knew them intimately?

At that, Avon turned to the bartender, a mutoid female twice his size, and said, “Put fifty for me on the blue team.” He nodded toward the football game.

“Done,” she said. Her nostrils flared. Otherwise, she made no other reaction to Avon’s bet.

Blake laughed aloud. “What is this? Your way of telling me you make more money than I do?”

Avon eyed him with a gleaming, almost scathing look. “Perhaps.”

“On gambling, right?”

“Yes. But only because I win. How else do you think I can afford these clothes?”

Blake had to agree. The nice, trim black slacks, the shirt that could have been silk. Blake’s own coveralls were Federation issue. All he had. Or cared to have.

The mellowness from the beers permeated him like a warm pool of water. When the game was over, Avon had indeed doubled his fifty credits. Blake felt himself laugh, really laugh as he hadn’t done in months.

“Looks like the evening’s on me, then,” Avon said, pocketing his winnings.

“Oh now,” Blake said, words slurring. “I don’t expect that.”

“How much have you drunk? Maybe ten credit’s worth?”

Blake leaned forward, tried to think. Dizziness sapped him. The table seemed to throb. Had he drunk only beer? Half-way through the evening, Avon had started ordering for them. Well, whatever it was he’d been drinking, it was nice. So nice.

“Let me take care of it,” Avon said, dark figure moving away from him, paying the bill, then coming up alongside Blake and placing a hand under his elbow to help him up.

Blake staggered through the amber halls of the dome-base with Avon at his side. Suddenly, the hall-lights turned reddish-orange. The ozone smell returned. He thought he heard, in the distance, a warning klaxon clanging. Before him were shadowy figures.

People who stared at him, images not quite solid. Three were very young, very beautiful people, and one a more middle-aged blond man. In front of them, a darker figure materialized, leather-clad, jacket pocked with silver studs. *Avon?* “Avon?” He said it aloud. The room shimmered; the image began to waver.

“What?” came the voice at his side.

The image in front of him raised his hands, undulated as if touched by an invisible wind. “Have you betrayed me?” it seemed to ask, though he couldn’t be sure if the words were spoken aloud. The face seemed to hold all the fallen hopes and pleading will of an entire galaxy.

He felt himself begin to buckle from a combination of thrill, shock, pain. “I was waiting for you,” he said to the leather-clad ghost.

“What?” came the voice at this side again.

The amber-light returned. Now Blake saw only the empty hall and Avon, one hand on his shoulder, staring at him with a frown. “You’re not going to be sick on me, are you?” he asked.

Blake blinked. “I...I thought I saw...you. And...and I saw these other people behind you. Kinda familiar.”

The thin, brown eyebrows rose. “Familiar like me?”

Blake nodded.

“You’re drunk,” was Avon’s conclusion.

“But it was so real. It was as if I’d been waiting for them. For you. Does any of that make sense to you?”

“No.”

“And there were lights. And an alarm going off. And something about a betrayal.”

“You’re deluded,” Avon said gently. “Come on and let’s get you off to bed.” The touch of the man was delicate, yet strong. Sensitive, yet firm. Something about it made Blake lean all the more heavily upon it, craving more.

In the apartment, Blake still felt dizzy, out of place, as if a part of him were still lost somewhere in the limbo of the memory of the red lights and the ghost-Avon whose tortured, pleading face made his heart ache.

It was real. It had to be. Blake's body wouldn't react like this to something that wasn't! He knew this to be a fact from his rare viewings of the holo-films in the dream booths.

"Sit down," said Avon as they entered the bedroom, "and let's get your shoes off."

"No." Sobriety had returned all too quickly to Blake. "No, it's real, Avon. What I saw. I know it was real."

"And you think it was me in your memory?" Avon asked, standing before him, hip cocked, hands at his waist.

"It's more than one memory."

"Something to do with why you're always staring at me, eh?"

"Yes." Blake nodded. "I know you. I know I do. But you are sure we've never met?"

Avon frowned. "Yes." But the answer came a little too quickly. "Quite sure."

"You feel nothing when I look at you?"

"Well now, you haven't asked me that question before."

"What do you mean?" Blake stared at him trying to read through the cool, proud exterior.

"I'm bisexual and I like dark curly hair. Is that what you're after?"

Blake felt his face instantly heat. "I meant...I..." He couldn't finish. The blatant come-on had left him speechless.

Avon swung his hands behind his back as a small smile touched his lips. "I meant that as a compliment. If it offends you, well, then, that is your problem."

"Offend?" Blake gulped. "No, I just..." He saw the lips glisten and again Blake could envision them parted, flushed from pleasure. And the rest of Avon, too, was revealed as a quicksilver memory teased along his mind of Avon bending in the low light, dark slacks puddling to the floor, pale, lean-muscle flesh revealed, narrow buttocks soft as velvet to the touch and, when he turned around, a sure, arrogant cock flushed dark as cherry shadows curving up and toward him.

Gods, had this very man been his lover? Why, then, would Avon not remember as well?

"Stop looking at me like that," Avon said, the frown returning to his face, making it look lost of hope again, pleading.

Have I betrayed him? Blake asked himself. The question made sense only in the context of his memory-vision in the hallway, yet the sense that he had, or that Avon thought he had, could not be ignored.

“I didn’t mean...” Again, Blake could not finish his thought. He sat down hard on his bunk.

Suddenly, Avon knelt before him. He took Blake’s hands in his own. “You can’t have known me before,” he said quietly, almost coldly. “Blake, you can’t.”

“But...”

“No.” Avon shook his head adamantly. “Because, if you have, then why don’t I remember? Why, hmmm? And that’s not a question I’m willing...” He paused, winced, took a deep breath. “Not a question I’m willing or able to ponder.” His jaw hardened. Blake could see the teeth clenched beneath the familiar lips.

“But if...” Blake began.

“No!” The voice nearly shouted. But Avon’s finger, where it touched his lips to silence him, was soft, silken. “Don’t do this!” The finger was taken away before Blake could respond to it. Fire touched the brown eyes, and a turmoil of brightness Blake did not like because he had seen it only too many times in his own eyes whenever he looked in a mirror.

“Gods...” Blake felt himself start to tremble.

Avon lowered his eyes. Shut up! Just shut up!” He moved his hands to Blake’s thighs and began to knead. Then he leaned forward and lay his head against Blake’s upper thigh.

Automatically, Blake reached out and cupped the back of Avon’s neck, fingers weaving through the loose, brown hair. He felt his penis harden but ignored it. They remained that way for what seemed a long moment, silent, barely breathing, Blake’s body still trembling as if it had awakened from a long, unnatural sleep.

At last, Avon moved. The side of his face brushed Blake’s crotch. A zing of electricity surged through Blake’s body, both pleasure and aching entwined.

Avon obviously felt the hardness through the loose coveralls because he pressed harder against it with his cheek. Blake inhaled through clenched teeth, a hiss. He had no memory of ever feeling this way before. Neither the dream booths nor his own hand had ever given him this intensity, this eager, alive, yearning need to be touched, to be taken, to be held.

What did his body know that his mind refused to remember?

And yet there was something between them, a spark, a chemistry that came from more than just a two-week working relationship, more than merely physical curiosity and attraction.

I am the one you have loved for many years. The phrase came back to Blake like a song. The same song that he'd remembered earlier about the third arm, the second shadow. Had it been something he'd written? Sung? Listened to? Read? He wished with all his heart he could remember.

Avon moved against him again. He looked down at the top of the man's head, tawny brown hair falling like silk against his forearms as he pressed his hands tighter against Avon's neck.

Avon lifted his face and came upright on his knees. Blake bent down, still seated on the edge of his bunk. The other mans' eyes were glowing, the face flushed. And yet there was still something closed in the features. In the tightness of the jaw, the tension of the eyebrows and forehead. In the way his palms pressed hard against Blake's thighs as they moved closer. Blake could smell the sour-sweet scent of beer on Avon's breath.

When their lips touched, the red warning lights went off again in Blake's mind. The sound of laser-fire. Acrid burning scent.

Blake reached out and pulled Avon to him hard, as if the motion could protect the man from his vision, as if their coming together might refute the past and any dark secrets it held.

The kiss became more open, damp and searching. Avon's arms went around Blake's waist and Avon's body moved up, pushing Blake down to the mattress until he was on top of him. Blake could feel the slighter man's erection.

They turned on their sides facing each other and began peeling away clothing. Avon became the more aggressive, Blake still unsure since to his recollection he hadn't much experience in this area. Plus, images kept superimposing themselves over Avon's close face, the small room, the low ceiling. He saw a smooth, streamlined area with consoles and a large brilliant light on one wall that pulsed. Avon stood before the light as if speaking to it. It seemed to be the center of a complex or ship. The scene switched to another, darker room, and a harsher Avon standing before him, clothing angular and dark, eyes shifting, mouth open. He saw the ghosts of the beautiful young people behind him again, and the one uncannily familiar blond man. The strange room was like a control center. There were consoles. There were many strobing lights.

Lips touched his neck, softly suckling. It felt good, known. Fantastic and nerve-wracking at the same time. Hands roamed lower, pushing the coveralls away from his hips, exposing him, revealing hard flesh. Hands brushed his erection. He gasped at the

desire that filled him. It was like a wild throbbing electricity that could not be contained. He moaned. He thrashed as Avon's hands closed on him, stroking.

"Gods!" Blake tried to close off the image of the harsh Avon who still stared at him from his inner mind. His knees bent. He shook.

"Hell, I didn't hurt you, did I?" Avon's hand came back up to his chest, rubbing the center. His face bent close to Blake's again. His breath was warm and sweet.

"No, it's just... It's been so long."

"You don't remember doing anything like this before, do you?"

No, except for the possibility I've done it with you, Blake thought. But aloud he said, "Not exactly."

A low chuckle came from Avon. He kissed him, hands moving over his chest, fingertips brushing a faded scar in the center. "And what about this?" Avon asked. "Do you remember getting this?"

Blake glanced down. The puckered skin was paler than the rest of him, and a very pale pink around the edges of the scar. Mostly, he ignored it. An old wound, like a burn. No, he didn't remember getting it. "I don't know." As he spoke, again came the image of Avon standing before him, arms raised about chest level. And then he saw, through the winking lights and haunted shadows, what the hands held. A gun. The gun was aimed at Blake's chest.

He inhaled sharply as Avon's mouth kissed the scar. "No," he said softly, pushing at Avon's head.

"Sensitive?" Avon asked.

No, that wasn't it. But he lied. "Yes."

The image continued to play, even as Avon moved further down his body. A flash erupted from the gun. Avon's hands found his erection again, pulling it up taut. Then his mouth covered the aching tip, warm and velvet, wet and sucking. The flash from the gun hit him hard. His chest heaved. His body bucked, thrusting his erection deeper into Avon's mouth.

Pain. Pleasure.

The gun from the ghost-image fired again, even as he moved forward. "Avon," he hissed. The mouth on his cock was like flame, moving over him, capturing him. Need and euphoria shivered through him even as, in his mind, he moved closer to the darker Avon and took a third shot in the chest area.

“Avon,” he whispered.

The mouth came up. The hands held him tight. He came, even as, in the vision, he fell forward, Avon catching him, mouth, arms, black leather, smooth naked skin.

Orgasm waved through him. A violence. A tenderness. Betrayal. Love.

Confusion amidst all the emotions ended in fear, in desperation.

“Avon!” He moved down pulling the other man to him, holding onto him so tight that Avon began to make complaining noises.

“All right, all right,” Avon said. “I’m not going anywhere.”

But somewhere an echo followed that statement. *Have you betrayed me?* Avon’s voice in Blake’s head asked. *Have you?*

Blake remembered more as he held the slimmer man, as Avon wrapped his arms around him, as he breathed warm against his chest. They had been together once. They’d had a ship. They fought side by side. They’d disagreed. They’d argued, battled each other, their reliance, their strange love/hate loyalty that bound them, each to each.

I’ve always trusted you, Blake had said once to a sullen Avon, black-clad, cold, hurt.

He remembered it all then, like a shock wave from a bomb. They’d met in prison. They’d escaped. They’d found the alien ship. All of it was there, the memories like a light being turned on in a too-long dark room. He remembered their first lovemaking session after discovering both really were fighting the same battle, the same oppression. And then they’d been separated.

Blake moved on the bed, touched the man beneath him with renewed vigor, and memory of what Avon liked and didn’t like, how Avon would respond. Yes, the man had a bad back, so he had to be careful in that area. Yes, he liked to be fucked, so it would be okay if he touched him there, if he put him in that vulnerable position many men of strength were afraid of.

He moved down Avon’s body, and remembered.

Separation. Loneliness. Hearing rumors that Avon, of all people, had continued Blake’s crusade half-way across the known galaxy. Remembered.

Waiting for Avon.

He touched the man's erection, dark and stiff, seeking release. He kissed the tip remembering the unique, musk taste. He let his hands moved under the narrow hips, supporting the weak lower back, mouth moving lower to suck on the balls.

Blake's long lost feelings of sexuality returned. The first orgasm was only a test, a taste of what had been submerged within for too long. He was hard again. He wanted this man. This friend. This lover from his past whose mind was as fragile and forgetful as his own. And gods alive, that could not be a coincidence.

He mouthed Avon until the man was groaning, calling his name in a sharp tone.

Then he positioned himself, remembering the way in, the path he knew so well, the love. "Avon," he said.

"Yes!" the man beneath him hissed.

He pushed himself into the living, inviting warmth. The muscles closed around him as if they'd missed him, as if they wanted more and more and more.

Blake began to move, slowly at first, then with building, stronger rhythm.

He'd waited for Avon for two years. He couldn't believe it when he saw him in the control room on Gauda Prime, an older, bitterer Avon. An Avon whose face was more closed than ever, and whose trust was damaged by great forces than had tried to tear at their love.

He didn't blame Avon. It was a surprise. The man had shot him. Got them both caught. Killed, in essence. But he only felt love now, even as the replay of the gunfire assaulted him, as he assaulted Avon with his love. Even as he remembered falling into this man's arms, bloody, defeated, pain-filled, there was only pleasure now.

Avon thought Blake had betrayed him. Admittedly, it had looked that way.

Avon groaned beneath him, cock arching as Blake pushed into him. He reached out and gripped the man's erection, closing his fingers around it, urging pleasure.

I love you, he thought, even as he remembered, half-conscious, the Federation guards surrounding them. The orders to have them taken away and, if they lived, mind-wiped.

"Blake!" Avon called out.

"Yes," he replied. *I remember.*

"Yes," he said again, feeling the man's muscles clench around him, the deep throb of orgasm coming, the so-warm cock in his hand jerking as, together, they came. The

second time was deep, slow, the turmoil and tingling following him into a drug-like stupor.

They lay in the aftermath of bliss, arm in arm.

“There was something more in that than just fucking,” Avon murmured, half snide, half reverent.

Blake looked at him long and hard. His heart quickened. His body warmed, then chilled. He could only nod. His voice was stuck behind a swelling in his throat.

Yes, there had been so much more. But how to begin to tell this man who’d already said he was not able to deal with the idea that he, too, had memory problems?

I am the one whom you cannot accept, and who can never forget you. Lines from a song again? No, he remembered. It was a poem. A poem Avon had given him one quiet night just before the storm, the war at Star One, just before the separation that had virtually ended both their lives.

Gods, there had been so much between them. It had to be done. He had to tell him.

But where to start the story that could end up tearing them apart again? Blake gazed at the beloved face, running his hands down the firm, hard jaw.

More words from another poem came back to him. *Let the young rain of tears come, let the calm hands of grief come. It’s not all as evil as you think.*

But that sentiment, Blake knew now, was a lie. For all that was left to them *was* evil. And grief. All, that was, save for this tiny little pocket of love they had shared out of memory, out of time.

And soon, even that would end.

Everything always did.

(end)

*The poems quoted in this story are from Rolf Jacobsen’s “Guardian Angel” and “Sunflower.” These two poems appear in Jacobsen’s book, **Twenty Poems**, published in 1977 by Seventies Press, and translated by Robert Bly.*