

# Tears of the Heart

BY KATHY HINTZE

He found Cally lying on her side, partially covered with rubble, halfway to the ladder which led to safety. Safety for Vila and Tarrant, but not for you, Cally, Avon mused grimly, kneeling beside her. No, you had to return to fetch ORAC.

He didn't attempt to move any of the concrete. She was dead, what was the use? Dead and cold. Still, he did gently wipe her face with a kerchief, removing the film of dirt that had settled there. Her eyes were open. What did they see, he wondered. The ghosts of her people, the Aurnae whom Servalan had murdered. Her sister's spirit perhaps? Or, more likely, they saw the darkness which was slowly filling the corridor around him as the lighting system began its own death.

All of his musings were pointless and he knew it. He should be going, not kneeling beside a dead woman who had meant nothing to him. And, even as the words came to mind, he knew them to be a lie. Cally had meant something to him, more than he had ever acknowledged to anyone, even himself.

She'd been a kindred spirit whose courage and stubbornness had matched his own on more than one occasion. Had things been different, in time they might have been lovers. But there had been Anna who had destroyed much within him that he called love. Her deception had distorted the image until he no longer recognized it.

A part of himself felt Cally's loss, screamed in rage, and cursed Servalan to the darkest of hells. But only a small part. Sentiment was weakness. He'd told Cally that and how to protect herself from it. He closed her eyes, then gently kissed her forehead.

"I wish it had been otherwise," he murmured. "I wish..."

"Avon, are you all right? Did you...did you find anything?"

Avon twisted halfway about, thinking that the thief had followed him, had borne witness to his actions; but no, Vila was not there. He'd merely called down the ladder shaft.

"I'm coming up now, Vila," Avon replied, keeping his voice even.

"Good. Tarrant's coming 'round, moaning and groaning something horrible. Is it...is it bad down there?"

Avon heard the question Vila was afraid to voice. Was Cally dead? Or had she somehow survived? "I found ORAC," he replied in a flat, emotionless voice.

Something like a sob echoed down to him. Cally had meant something to Vila as well. A friend, a comfort when the thief needed it as he'd needed someone after that affair on Keezarn. Avon knew of that by mere chance, spotting Cally leaving Vila's cabin three hours after they'd left orbit around the planet. The Aurn had sensed the man's distress over the loss of the woman, Kerrill and offered what comfort she could.

Cally had always known when someone was suffering. She'd come to him after Anna's death, for all he'd demanded to be left alone. He'd hurled bitter words at her, but Cally had ignored them all, seating herself on the edge of his bed and waited out his rage. Then she'd asked, "Do you feel better now?"

Despite the pain of the memory, Avon smiled. He had felt much better and reluctantly had admitted as much.

Slowly he got to his feet and reached to shake himself off with shaking hands. No, damn it! He clenched his fists, forcing them still, refusing to give in to the pain he felt at her lonely passage. Alone, but not silent. Vila had told him how she'd called out to him, how she had called Blake's name.

He scowled. Blake. Always Blake. Everywhere he turned, the ghost of the man haunted him. Why? Why?

"Avon, Tarrant's awake now," Vila called again, his tone almost as flat as Avon's had been.

"He wants..."

"I don't care, Vila," Avon snarled, snatching up ORAC as he headed for the ladder. At its base he paused, glancing back down the corridor, eyes dark as night. "I never wished this for you, Cally," he whispered. "I'm sorry." Then he scrambled up the ladder back into the daylight, back to the living.