

## Eden – part 1

by Angela Reese

“One should forgive one’s enemies, but not before they are hanged.”

-Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

“You must!”

“We can’t, Avon!” Blake insisted, entering his office. “She’s too valuable to kill.”

Avon stood in the doorway, hands clenched, glaring. “Servalan is much too dangerous for us not to kill her! How can you even consider letting her live?” he demanded, moving into the room. “That woman is responsible for millions for murders! Remember Gan? Remember Cally?”

Blake winced and sat down heavily. “Do you think I don’t know what she is? Do you think I don’t want to kill her myself, every time I think of Cally and Gan? Do you!?” By this time, the rebel leader was nearly bellowing up at Avon.

Coming down the hall, Deva heard the shouting and sighed. Deciding that he didn’t really need his office just then, he turned around and headed to the main control room. Meeting Ann on the way, Deva stopped her and pulled her along with him. “You don’t want to go that way,” he informed the redhead. “They’re at it again.”

“Oh,” Ann replied with a grin. “Seen Vila anywhere? He promised he’d help me work on the *Normandy*.”

Back in the office, Avon looked down at Blake thoughtfully. Walking slowly, he paced the length of the room, rubbing his palms. Suddenly, he spun around to face Blake. “All right, then, you win.”

Blake looked up, startled. “What?”

“You heard me. You win. Servalan can live – I’ll not argue any more. But,” he added fiercely, “I want Soolin in charge of guarding her.”

“Done,” Blake agreed readily. “Why?”

Avon smiled slightly. “She cannot be seduced, she cannot be bought, and I doubt even Servalan can outwit her.”

Blake grinned. “Quite a testimonial,” he declared. “Would you like to inform her of her new job?”

Avon gave him a wry grin. “Let Deva do it – he’s always looking for a reason to talk to Soolin. Besides,” he added, leaving, “if she received any sort of compliment from me, the poor girl would die of shock.”

The hall echoed with Blake’s laughter.

“...and when the Federation realized I couldn’t be brainwashed or programmed, they shipped me off to Cygnus Alpha,” Vila was saying as he and Ann relaxed outside the *Normandy*. Vila was introducing her to coffee breaks. “Then I met up with Blake, and the rest, as they say, is history.” He grinned at her cheerfully and offered the flask of water.

“All right, now,” Vila continued, a glint in his eye, “enough about me. Tell me about your background.”

He could’ve sworn Ann blushed. She started to get up. “We really should get back to work...”

“Oh, no, you don’t,” Vila scolded, pulling her back down. “Come on, you know all my secrets; share and share alike.”

Ann sighed. “Oh, well, why not.” She settled back down on the ground, leaning against Vila. “My parents are Federation Councilors – when I had parents. They disowned me when I left home two years ago. A disgrace to the family, they said. Their coworkers and friends all think I’m living on an outer world somewhere. Better to lie, I suppose, than to have their only child hunted down and sentenced to a penal colony.”

Vila tightened his arm around her. “Why did you leave home?” he asked gently.

Ann smiled reminiscently. “I think that surprised me as much as my parents,” she laughed. “I had just graduated from the Academy, top of my class – the same year as your friend Tarrant, actually, although in a different department – and was home waiting to receive my assignment. Then came the Andromedan invasion, and news that an Academy graduate had supposedly turned traitor. Many of my classmates were still at the school – those who didn’t have influential families – and most of them went off to join the war.” She sighed. “Only two of them survived.

“My parents had been called back to Earth for the duration, but had left me behind. Although our home planet was fairly close to the war front, they didn’t want me on Earth to be drafted.”

Ann paused to take a drink of water and grinned up at Vila. “You know, we could work while I talk,” she suggested. Vila pretended to consider the idea, then shook his head and leaned back. “Naaah,” he said, “this is much more comfy. So,” he prompted, “you were left at home...”

“Two nights after they left, an escape pod crashed on our property. I was in the area, checking the weather machines, so I arrived before the soldiers. There was a woman in the pod, only a few years older than myself and barely conscious. I couldn’t believe she’d managed to land in one piece.”

Ann smiled to herself, reliving the encounter. “You know, throughout my childhood I was raised to believe the Federation was wonderful. It was because of the Federation that we had a lovely house, and servants, and enough money to provide anything we wanted. My parents spoiled me terribly. They gave me everything I wanted – but they never really understood me, or I them.

“I had seen before how the soldiers had treated Betas and Deltas who trespassed on my family’s lands. I suddenly realized how much worse they would hurt this woman, whose only crime was actively disagreeing with Federation practices.”

Ann noticed Vila’s startled, comprehending look and smiled, wondering why Dayna and Del though the thief was an idiot. “Oh, yes,” she continued, “I recognized her immediately, despite the bruises. At the Academy, we were made to memorize all ‘resistors’, and her picture was one of the most circulated. Yours didn’t do you justice,” she added cheerfully, grinning at him.

“Jenna,” Vila said softly, amazed.

Ann nodded. “I pulled her out of the pod and set it to destruct, then hid in the woods while the soldiers came and left. They assumed the passenger had been killed as well. I brought Jenna back to the house and told the servants she was a classmate of mine, recuperating from the war. They saw her as a hero – they couldn’t do enough for her. Two weeks later, my parents returned.”

“Uh-oh,” Vila muttered.

“You can say that again,” Ann declared dryly. “They were not pleased when the servants mentioned my visitor, and even less when they discovered who it was. My father instructed me to do the proper thing and turn her over to the authorities immediately. I told him I would do nothing of the sort, and was sent to my room while he called security. Jenna and I had already

made plans to leave the planet, however; we were gone well before anyone could reach us. Given the choice between lying and having his daughter declared a criminal, my father chose the former. He told the security forces that had had been mistaken in what he saw, then contacted the Academy and told them I had been married off to a Governor on some obscure frontier world.

“About a month later, I picked up a coded message on my ship’s radio – it was a code my father and I had made up when I was ten. He told me about my “marriage”, and added that unless I returned home and accepted whatever post the Academy offered, he would no longer consider me his daughter.” Ann paused, then looked at Vila. “I tore up the printout.”

“And so you met up with Blake and the rebellion,” Vila added, grinning.

Ann chuckled. “Oh, yes, Blake. Jenna and I were sent to contact someone from another rebel group who was looking for pilots; Blake turned out to be the contact. I knew who he was right away, of course, and the temptation was too much to resist.” She gave Vila a wicked smirk. “I picked him up.”

“You what?!?” Vila burst out laughing.

“I slinked over to him – they teach that at Academy, you know – gave the code phrase, and bought him a drink. I think I had him pretty confused for a few minutes, till we got back to my room and he saw Jenna.” She laughed. “The poor man nearly had heart failure when he turned around and saw her behind the door.”

By this time, Vila was nearly hysterical. “And?” he prodded between snickers.

“He said: ‘What’s a nice girl like you doing with someone as danger-prone as Jenna?’” Ann smirked. “Sound familiar?”

“So that’s what you meant!” Vila exclaimed. “And then?”

“And then we joined him and Deva, and the four of us managed to run things quite well,” she finished. “And now,” Ann declared, standing up, “it’s time we got back to work!”

As Vila opened his mouth, automatically complaining, every light in the base went out. “What the...”

“What the...” Avon began, as every light in the base went out.

“Damn! The generators are out again!” In the blackness, Avon could hear Blake crossing the room to the doorway, banging into the chair en route. “Deva!!!” he bellowed into the hall.

“You screamed?” Deva’s voice inquired dryly from the other door.

“Ah, there you are. How long will it take this time?”

“You mean it’s happened before?” Avon interjected, incredulous.

“Constantly,” Deva sighed. “It’ll be at least ten minutes to get it going again.”

“And meanwhile, we’re stuck with no power, no lights; at least there’s plenty of air,” Blake finished cheerfully, walking into the chair again. “Ow!”

Avon grinned, then stiffened as another thought occurred to him. “Servalan! The prison cells...”

“The prison cells have barred doors as well as force shields,” Blake reassured him. “Servalan isn’t going anywhere.”

Dora had been hovering nervously outside the cellblock entrance, trying to act as if she wasn’t just hanging around just outside the cellblock entrance. The instant the generator went out, she put on the infrared visor she’d hidden in her pouch and walked casually into the cell block, calling out Soolin’s name to show she wasn’t sneaking in. As she did so, however, Dora used her visor to locate Soolin and shoot her.

Acting quickly, she searched Soolin for the keys to the cells. Finding the ones she needed, Dora turned to Servalan's cell door and unlocked it, handing the ex-president her gun as she went to release Arlen and Klyn.

Servalan took the gun and calmly shot Dora in the back. She then aimed in the direction of Klyn and Arlen's startled cries and shot them as well, leaving – she assumed – no witnesses. Not knowing how long the blackout would last, Servalan left the cellblock at a run, heading for the hangar bay.

The corridors were empty, and she made it all the way to the hangar bay entrance before she ran into someone in the dark. Reacting instinctively, Servalan brought up her gun and aimed at the person's chest; as she fired, however, the lights came back on and threw her aim off by a fraction, the noise of the blast swallowed up by the sound of the generator coming back on. Blinking in the sudden glare, she realized that it was Tarrant she had shot, as he slumped to the floor. Believing her shot to have been fatal, Servalan allowed herself a brief moment of regret before rushing to the nearest ship, the *Normandy*.

"This is taking an awful long time to fix, isn't it?" Vila asked anxiously.

"No, the generator goes down all the time; we've gotten used to it by now." Ann sighed. "I hope the one on Eden is more reliable."

"Eden?" Vila asked, taking advantage of the dark to scootch closer.

"Eden's our new rebel base," Ann replied, smiling as she heard Vila move closer.

"We've been building it for nearly a year. Blake should be ordering the evacuation soon; I believe he was just waiting for your group."

"Well, I'm in no rush," Vila declared. "I could get quite used to sudden blackouts. How long do these last, anyway?"

"Not long enough for what you're thinking of!" Ann replied, giggling.

"How would you know what I'm thinking?" Vila said innocently, a pout in his voice that Ann could nearly see. "We could tell ghost stories!"

"What?"

"Y'know, ghost stories. Haven't you ever told ghost stories in the dark?"

"I'm afraid that's one of the things my childhood lacked," Ann said, grinning. "What's it like?"

"Well' we'll just have to make up lost time now. Let's see, which one should I... Oh!" There was a roar as the generator kicked on again, cutting Vila off.

They blinked in the sudden light. "Drat," Vila complained. "Oh, well, no ghost stories for now."

Ann laughed, getting up. "You'll just have to save it for later."

"On the contrary," a voice said from behind them, "I think you should tell her now." Ann and Vila spun around, then paled as they saw Servalan holding a gun on them. The ex-prisoner smiled at them. "After all, I really don't think you'll have another chance."

Deva was checking over the computers, making sure nothing vital had been lost in the blackout, when one of the technicians called him over to the monitors.

"Yes, what is it?" Deva asked, wondering at the urgency in the woman's face. He glanced at the monitor in question, then froze as the scene registered: the prison area, and four bodies... Deva hit the intercom next to him. "Medical emergency! Detention area, four casualties!" He only half-heard the response as he turned to go there himself, nearly running into Avon and Blake behind him. Avon gave him a puzzled look, which turned to shock when he was the monitor screen.

Before anyone could speak, another young woman ran up to them. “*Normandy* is taking off without clearance! The blast door code was overridden, and they shot out before we could close them again.”

Deva stared at her, then looked at Blake and Avon. “Ann and Vila were working on *Normandy* today. Do you think...”

Before he could finish his thought, they were interrupted yet again by another technician. “Sir, Tech Velar is signaling from the hangar bay. She says she came out of *Nightwitch* and found a man on the floor, shot, just after *Normandy* took off. She doesn’t know who he is, but it looks fatal.”

Avon was already heading toward the communications room, the others close behind. Sliding into the chair, he began to instruct the computer to hail *Normandy* when he suddenly noticed that the ship’s visual transmissions were locked into the base, one-way only.

Deva frowned at the settings as Avon diverted the signal to their monitor. “That’s the emergency system Ann set up – it’s locked on transmit-only, but separate from the main comm system. We’ll be able to see everything, no one in the *Normandy* will see us, and we can still contact them without affecting it. No audio, though.”

The signal came through and focused at that moment, removing all doubt as to the situation. Ann was strapped into her seat at the controls, looking very unhappy. Vila was sprawled on the deck, unconscious or dead. And Servalan sat beside Ann, just out of reach, keeping her gun trained on the pilot.

Deva tuned even paler, and Blake swore under his breath. Avon’s hands were steady as he adjusted the transmission to feed Ann’s course information directly to printout, but his expression boded ill for Servalan once he got within arms reach of her again.

On board *Normandy*, Ann was talking, hoping it wouldn’t take too long for Deva and Blake to notice her signal. “You haven’t killed him, I hope,” she told Servalan. “If either of us are dead when Blake and the others come after you, you know you’ll never escape from them alive.”

Servalan laughed at her defiance. “You actually think they’ll manage to rescue you? By the time they figure out what happened, we’ll be well out of range of the base’s sensors.” She glanced down at Vila. “But no, he’s not dead yet. I have plans for this one.”

“What do you mean?” Ann asked warily, feeding their present course and fuel supply into the transmission, and blessing the inspiration that had led Jenna and herself to set it up. “What type of plans?”

Servalan gave her a predatory smile. “I have been wondering how it would affect Vila’s lockpicking skills if he were to become a mutoid,” she said, enjoying the horrified look on Ann’s face. “This seems like an excellent opportunity to find out.”

Back on the base, ground crews were scurrying around, trying to get one of the other ships ready to launch. Deva was talking to one of the pilots, then came back over to Blake and Avon.

“It’s no good,” he sighed. “The only ships here are small hoppers and such; the larger ones are on delivery runs to Eden. And since they were being stripped down for the evacuation, nothing will be flight-ready for at least 20 minutes.”

“That’s not good enough!” Blake shouted, slamming a fist down onto a nearby console. The nearby technicians winced, then went on with their work. Blake noticed the looks Avon and Deva were giving him and sighed, unclenching his fist and rubbing the back of his neck

nervously. “Sorry,” he said, leaning back against one of the consoles. “I can’t stand just sitting here!”

Just then, one of the flight controllers hurried over. “Blake! *Defiant* is back from Eden ahead of schedule! She’ll be landing in four minutes!”

Blake stared at him for a moment, then grinned fiercely. “We have her now, Avon! *Defiant* is twice as fast as *Normandy*!” He headed for the exit, the other three following close behind. “Kyler, contact *Defiant* and inform her we’ll be taking off immediately. Deva, you’re in charge of the evacuation. If Servalan manages to get away from us, we can’t leave any trace of our operations here. Don’t wait for us to get back before you destroy the buildings; we’ll meet you at Eden – with Ann and Vila.”

“All right,” Deva said as they reached the hangar. “And Blake? Avon?” They paused to look back at him. “Good luck.”

Avon half-smiled at him before turning back to the ship that was just landing. Blake gripped Deva’s shoulder briefly. “We’ll see you soon. And this time,” he added grimly, “we won’t have any prisoners.”

“Good,” Deva replied just as fiercely, thinking of Vila and Ann on *Normandy*, and the trail of bodies Servalan had left on the base. He watched as Blake hurried to board *Defiant*, then turned and went back to the control room. He had an evacuation to run.

At *Defiant*, Blake caught up with Avon just as the boarding ramp was lowering. “Avon,” he said hurriedly, suddenly remembering the surprise he had planned for the tech and Vila, “there’s something I’d better tell you about the pilot...”

At that moment, the pilot herself appeared at the entrance, cutting him off. Avon gave one startled look, then accepted it and concentrated on more urgent problems. “Blake! Avon! Thank the gods you both survived!” Jenna exclaimed as they hurried on board. She took a closer look at them. “What’s wrong? Why this rush to leave again?”

“Servalan!” Avon spat out, as Blake led the way to the flight deck.

“What?!?”

“Jenna, did you pick up *Normandy* as you were coming in?” Blake asked urgently.

“Yes, I was wondering why you had sent her...oh, no. Blake, you’re not telling me that Servalan has the *Normandy*?!?”

“And Ann, and Vila,” Blake replied grimly as they reached the flight deck. Avon pulled out the printout of information Ann had slipped out to them and began to feed it into the navigation computers.

Jenna had stopped dead and grabbed Blake’s arm. “What? How did she get hold of them?”

“The generator...” Blake was saying when Avon broke in.

“Could we possibly discuss this on the way? I would like to get closer to them before Servalan decides to change course.”

Jenna hurried over to her station as Blake signaled for the hangar doors to be opened. Seconds later, they were streaking through space after the *Normandy*.

Servalan was lounging at the communications station, sending out a message to the nearest Federation base requesting an escort. Ann hoped it wouldn’t interfere with the signal she was sending out – it had never been tested before, after all – and glanced at Vila in time to see him wink at her. Immensely relieved, Ann made sure Servalan was looking away and programmed their latest course changes into her transmission. She didn’t have much hope of

pursuit anytime soon, knowing the condition of the other ships at Gauda Prime, but when help did come, she wanted to make it as easy as possible to be found.

Keeping one eye carefully on Servalan, Vila sized up the situation without moving. Ann was securely tied to the chair – no help from there unless he could free her. No weapon in sight except for Servalan’s gun, although there were several small tools scattered about that would do in a pinch. It would have to be carefully planned out this time, however; Servalan was unlikely to simply stun him again if he started making trouble. Now, if only something would distract Servalan sufficiently for a few moments...

Avon had picked up Ann’s transmission on *Defiant* and fed it to the communication monitor, transferring the data she sent directly to the navigational computers. He also managed to interfere with Servalan’s communication with the Federation base; when she had the computer transmit *Normandy*’s course, Avon intercepted it and sent a new course, fixing the rendezvous several sectors away.

“We’re coming within range of *Normandy*’s sensors,” Jenna announced. “Ann will know help’s on the way; and so will Servalan, if she decides to check for her escort.”

Avon moved to the communications panel. “I believe it’s time we gave Madame Servalan a ring, then.”

Luckily, Servalan was watching the communications computer for the Federation confirmation when Ann glanced at the sensors – and then stared at them again in shock as she realized what ship was following them. Vila noticed her double take and gave her a questioning look; keeping one eye on Servalan, she gave him a big grin and a thumbs-up signal. His eyes widened in comprehension, then quickly shut as the computer signaled a message and Servalan turned back toward them.

“What is it?” she demanded, gun pointed at Ann again.

“Incoming message,” the pilot replied as calmly as she could. “There’s an unidentified ship approaching – it’s probably one of the pirates that hang around this area.”

Servalan gave her a sharp look as the signal came again. “I doubt that, my dear. We both know exactly who is on that ship.” She settled herself in the chair just behind Ann, holding the gun to her head. “Open the channel.”

Blake paced the flight deck as Avon signaled a second time. “She’s ignoring us,” he growled furiously. “I should never have talked you out of killing her, Avon.”

Avon looked at him, eyebrows raised, then glanced at Jenna. “Now he sees reason.”

His panel beeped, and Avon turned back to it. “She’s decided to acknowledge us now,” he announced grimly. “On screen.”

The viewer fuzzed, then cleared to show *Normandy*’s flight deck. Not much had changed from their first view of it. “Well, Servalan,” Avon said dryly, “I see you still haven’t learned how to ask nicely for things.”

She smiled, showing her teeth. “Would you have given them to me if I had asked?”

“No.”

“There you are, then.” She stood and moved around the console, still smiling. “And there you are, Jenna. I must admit, I didn’t expect to see you still with this group; neither of my spies had any information on you.”

“Not very good spies, then, were they?” Jenna commented sweetly.

“Good enough to escape your tests – and to perform one last duty in my service.”

“And just what do you expect to accomplish now, Servalan?” Avon asked, noticing Ann becoming very busy at her console. Blake apparently noticed as well, and drifted toward the computer that was monitoring Ann’s transmissions.

“Why, I expect to take this lovely ship back to the Federation with me. I expect to retrain its pilot to be loyal to the Federation, and I expect to have your little thief modified for my own personal use. And there is absolutely nothing you can do to stop me, Avon, without losing all three of them.” She began to turn away from the screen, then looked back. “Oh, and since I don’t imagine you’ll give up on following us, I also expect that you’ll be killed when I rendezvous with my escort in a short while. Why not admit defeat this time, Avon?” She turned back to Ann. “Disconnect.”

On *Defiant* the screen went black. Avon and Jenna turned to Blake, who had been standing just out of sight of the screen looking excited. “Well?” Avon said impatiently.

Blake grinned happily and patted the monitor with Ann’s message. “Vila’s alive,” he said, to their relief, “and they have a plan.”

Ann tensed nervously as the communications signal whistled, then relaxed as her scans showed no sign of the escort yet. “*Defiant* is signaling again,” she commented.

Servalan gave a satisfied smile and relaxed into a chair. “Ignore it.”

The signal came again after a few minutes, then a third time. A few seconds later, *Normandy* rocked under a blast from *Defiant*’s weapons. Shocked, Servalan nearly fell out of her chair. “What the... Hail that ship!”

A moment later, Blake appeared on the screen. “Yes, Servalan?”

“Are you trying to get your friends killed, Blake?” she spat out, standing in front of Ann’s console. “I don’t need much more encouragement!”

“Just trying to get your attention,” Blake said calmly. “Surely you must be willing to negotiate.”

“For what? Are you offering yourself in their place? Very noble of you, Blake, but where would we make the trade? Besides, I shall receive much more satisfaction by using your friends and your ship against you.”

Behind her, Ann quietly reached over and activated the comm signal. “Servalan,” she said, sounding nervous, “the Federation escort is signaling.”

Servalan had turned around when the signal came, and now turned back to the screen with a triumphant laugh. “I did warn you, Blake,” she said, stepping forward and ignoring Vila, who was lying still at her feet. “No negotiations; you’ll be captured or dead, all of you!”

At that moment, however, Ann threw *Normandy* into a quick spin, throwing Servalan off balance. As she stumbled, Vila suddenly came to life and leapt up, grabbing for her gun. As Blake, Avon and Jenna watched helplessly, Servalan managed to fire several shots while wrestling for control of the weapon, one of which hit Ann in the arm. Her cry distracted Vila for a moment, long enough for Servalan to wrench the gun free and move quickly out of reach, knocking him back to the floor. He froze.

Servalan backed up slowly, looking furious. “You have just become quite dispensable, thief,” she spat, taking careful aim.

As Avon dove for *Defiant*’s weapon controls, knowing he would not be in time, Ann managed to stretch her injured arm to reach the speed controls. Activating one of the programmed engine tests, she accelerated *Normandy* to TD10 and back to TD4 in the space of about 2 seconds.

As Vila was already on the deck, the sudden thrust only pushed him against the nearest wall. Servalan, however, was thrown forcibly against the communications console, hitting her head on the edge. The blast from the gun widely missed Vila, but destroyed the viewscreen.

There was complete silence on both ships for a long moment, broken by two heartfelt sighs of relief on *Normandy*, followed by a sudden burst of chatter as *Defiant* demanded to know what was going on. Vila grinned cheerfully at Ann as he collected Servalan's gun and moved to unstrap Ann from her chair, while answering Defiant.

"*Normandy* here, *Defiant*. Nice of you to stop by. Any new gossip?" Ann giggled – only slightly hysterical – at his tone.

"Vila!" There was a sudden babble as if everyone on *Defiant* was trying to talk at once, then Jenna apparently took over as captain. "Vila, are you both all right? What happened?"

"I'm fine, Ann's got a broken arm, and Servalan is either dead or unconscious, I'm not sure which." He paused to check. "Unconscious. She hit her head on the console when we accelerated. Unfortunately, she blasted the viewscreen in the process."

"We had noticed," Avon said in the background.

Vila grinned. "What should we do with her? Take her back with us?"

"NO!!" Four voices sounded at once. Vila gave Ann a reassuring look as Avon looked at Blake and smirked. "About time you agreed with me on something," he muttered, then leaned toward the comm panel. "She's your prisoner, *Normandy*," he pointed out. "What do you want to do with her?"

Vila looked at Ann, who grinned wickedly. "There are no planets within the range of *Normandy*'s life capsules," she pointed out. "I say we disable the controls on one, stick her in it, and let her die very, very slowly and very, very alone."

On *Defiant*, Avon raised one eyebrow and grinned at Jenna. "I think I like your partner." She laughed.

Once Servalan had been jettisoned in the disabled capsule, the ships set course for Eden. Ann and Vila had declined Avon's offer to transfer over and fix the viewscreen, declaring that they were more than capable of fixing things themselves, and that it would only waste more time. Once they were on their way, Vila got out the medical kit and replaced the makeshift bandage on Ann's arm with a cast, then settled both of them on the floor and offered her his water flask. She smiled and slid her good arm around him. "Vila?"

"Hmmm?"

"About those ghost stories..."

To be continued...(of course!)