

## No Strings

*They say he played like the very devil. As if he'd sold his soul for the privilege. That ancient crones in the dark garb of perpetual mourning would protectively cast the evil eye his way, upon meeting him in the street. And he wore it like a cloak, the darkness, cultivated a deadly nightshade of myth about himself. If it was a myth. There were those who swore they could see the dark prince crouched at his shoulder guiding his hands. As he fiddled, frenetic, possessed, one expected the instrument would ignite from the friction alone if not from the heated nature of the music itself. He played in a fever. Always.*

There was no other way to play. The penultimate act of passion as one reached for the crescendo.

Tap. Taptaptap. "Crap. That was pure crap. Utter and absolute. You couldn't follow a parade. Down Main Street. At high noon. You did learn how to read music at some point...didn't you?"

The third violin leaned over and whispered to the new second fiddle, "Don't worry. Her bite is much...much worse than her bark."

Kris couldn't take her eyes off the woman. Hunched forward over the podium, gripping its sides, dark dishevelled hair half covering her eyes. Those eyes. An ethereal, unearthly, electric blue that captured and enraptured instantly. A cool, cruel blue that showed no mercy, gave no quarter, suffered no fool. A commanding presence to say the very least. You wouldn't dare challenge that withering ice blue gaze. It would cut you down to a size you hadn't been since childhood. And it wasn't merely a question of not wanting to get on her bad side--for she didn't appear to have a good side, not one that had received an iota of press, at any rate, from her fellow musicians. Though Kris had been rather avidly researching the subject.

On a senior class trip, Kris had seen her conduct for the first time. A prestigious appointment for a woman, a near major orchestra. Such flair and passion, a controversial interpretation of all the requisite mainstay pieces at a thundering tempo and timbre plus a near radical reading of The Pastorale. A revelation. It had been like watching the famous film of Mehta conducting The Bolero. Dazzling. In the documentary short, of course, the camera could focus on his face, something only the players had been privileged to see before.

*A being possessed, he leered, sweated profusely, drops scattered from his hair and face with every manic thrust of his arms through the air. And he bore a look of such pure elation and triumph at the climax, it was like watching the conquering hero ride into Persepolis on his white charger.*

Diana's body as she conducted evoked this same sort of passionate abandon in the music and Kris longed to see for herself--from the other side of the podium. Her teachers had been a bit disappointed when she opted for The Pops. But it had been Diana she was following and not