

ringing in her ears. Somehow she made her way to the ladies room and found herself retching over the sink. Oh, boy. What the hell is that all about? You'd think this was really important--or something. A matter of life and death. It's only an expression...she sat on the chair by the bathroom's one high window...of an internal paradigm..and she's just an...elicitor. She thought you could interpret it...the way she wanted and, apparently, you didn't let her down. 'Yet,' a nagging voice tortured her. You have to go out there and do it again. It should get easier, right? Shouldn't it?

She got up and dared to face herself in the mirror. Paler than usual, no color in her cheeks. Pinching some life back into them she fortified herself and made her way back to the stage. Diana remained fairly subdued--for her. She had some strong words for the winds which made the strings giggle inwardly and feel superior. For some reason in most orchestras the winds and string sections had the uttermost contempt for each other. The winds claimed the strings were never in tune. But, in tuning, they had a much more sophisticated and, therefore, difficult instrument from which to coax heavenly sounds. Better than just blowing into it. On stage, there existed an invisible line between the sections. Pretty generally, it held true, they loathed each other. And forged completely different societies on the outside as well. At least, this had been Kris' experience so far in the dozen or so orchestras she'd played with. It was amazing, at times, that they fostered the cohesion to play together at all.

After three and a half hours the rehearsal was called. Since it was later than usual the hall cleared out quickly. Except for Kris. She continued to sit there as Diana collected her scores and loaded her soft leather briefcase. Kris couldn't help her eyes riveting to the woman once she looked up from encasing her violin. Diana must've felt the gaze, smiling indulgently in wry amusement she zipped her bag with a flourish and said, "Everyone else couldn't wait to get out of here." Kris continued to study her. "Are you waiting for my approval, Ms--"

"Kris. It's Kris. Please. And no, I wasn't. I mean, not unless you wanted to--"

"You know me, if I hadn't approved of the way you played you would've heard it loudly and clearly."

"I don't."

"Don't what...Kris?"

"Don't know you. Not yet. But I intend to."

"Sounds like a serious threat."

Kris grinned. As much from the silly old phrase that flitted through her mind--screw your courage to the sticking place. That set all sort of images to skittering behind her lively eyes.

"You hungry?" Kris asked.

Diana raised a single brow, "You sure you don't have some place to be?"

"Nope. Free and--well, maybe not so easy."

"Good to know. I suppose. I don't generally fraternize."

"You have to eat. Might as well. Come on. I found a neat new place. You can tell me where I need to improve. You do like Italian?"

Tortellini Carbonara and red wine. Doesn't get any better than