

that. Kris felt so mellow in post-prandial well-being. Head propped on her hand, she hung on every word as Diana sketched out the coming season.

"The Orff isn't locked in. But it's tricky. We'll have to start on it soon."

"I love Orff. So...pagan. It makes me feel positively tribal."

"Do you know the Musica Poetica?" Diana asked.

"Of course. The Music for Children."

"Yes. Rondes et Comptines. One of my favorites."

"Really? Mine too." Kris' eyes were positively glowing with green intensity.

"That magical little piece with xylophones--"

"Yes! I can feel the sunlight through the trees. I close my eyes and I'm in 'the forest primeval.' It makes me want to dance."

"It's supposed to." Diana was smiling warmly now, somewhat unguarded for the moment.

"Why don't we pull it out of the cupboard?"

"Hmm. I'm not sure the percussionists would go for the toy drums."

"It's a short piece. Be fun to do. Knock them back in their overpriced seats. I'm sure they've never heard it before."

"It's a thought. But you know the board. They'll pressure me to do the requisite Lloyd Webber." The beautiful woman looked comical as she rolled her eyes. "Sometimes I think if I have to do one more rendition of an overdone arrangement from 'Superstar' or 'Cats' I'll fall on my baton." Kris chuckled. "Rock Opera," Diana shuddered disdainfully.

Kris nodded. "You think it trivializes opera."

"On the contrary, I think it trivializes rock."

Kris' grin was wide and a bit surprised. The waiter brought them the check which Diana began to reach for, but was intercepted by Kris who handed off her card to the young man, probably an actor. They were usually actors. "My treat."

As they walked across W. 57th in the cool afternoon shadows thrown down by stone giants Kris said, "You enjoyed yourself. Admit it."

"Alright. I will. You're a...pleasant companion."

Kris laughed. "I'll settle for that. For now."

"Don't intend on being anything more," she warned. "I can't afford friends."

"I'm not angling for anything more than that."

"Aren't you?"

Kris looked a little hurt at that and frowned. "Do I appear to be?"

"No. But we all know about the deceptive practices of what is or should be apparent. Sometimes we even deceive ourselves worst of all."

"Diana, I wear my heart on my sleeve--but I don't attach a label--or a condition to it."

The tall woman stopped. They were standing by the fountain at Columbus Circle just outside the park. "If I asked you to...would you come home with me?"

Kris swallowed, completely taken aback, not expecting that plan of attack at all. "I...uh..."

"You have to think about it, huh?" Diana smiled.

That was it. She was teasing, testing. "Depends...on why you're asking."