

whatever particular name the orchestra happened to go by in the summer months. She could still rate a stand-by status to the larger body of the Philharmonic proper and she'd convinced them and herself that it was better to start out here, in a bit less of a hothouse atmosphere...but they'd attempted to warn her of the maestro's reputation. All to no avail. When Kris determined on something, that was it. She'd hang on tenaciously and never let go, warm, but deeply resolved, green eyes fastened firmly on the prize goal she set for herself. Something she'd always won before. Why should this time be any different?

"Ooo, you've got it bad. You're really fixated, aren't you? This is as seriously twisted as when the 'client' transfers to the shrink and becomes obsessed anew."

"Ralphie, honey, don't pick on the little love. She'll learn. In her own sweet time." David rolled his eyes and sat back, sipping his tea on the old ratty couch in the practice room. "Don't let him mother hen you."

"Doesn't seem to bother you," Ralph observed.

David smiled sweetly. "True. But I invite it. Kris doesn't know you like I do."

"Nor wishes to. Am I right?" He turned to the young blonde woman restringing her instrument. "Made you blush."

David shot him another affectionately disapproving glance. "We're having our annual mixer for new members. The witch will put in a perfunctory appearance. The rest is up to you."

Kris looked up from her task. "All I asked was for a little background info."

"You've read the bio."

"Of course. Doesn't give much away though."

"And neither does she."

Kris only knew about the enigmatic conductor exactly as much as she wished anyone to know--a tersely worded paragraph in the playbill. Birthplace-- Piraeus, schooling--European, the best, impeccable credentials, daughter of the Greek-American ambassador and no one she'd spoken to seemed to know much more than that. There didn't appear to be even the usual amount of rumor mongering. She was a mystery. And all the more intriguing for that. There was endless speculation, however. Kris engaged in that pretty freely herself. She had to admit. Diana was everything she'd wanted to be--and never would.

"Look," Ralph said, "if it's personal affinities you're searching out, all I can tell you is both Tom Atkinson and Liz Sherman met a sound rebuff--and they're not exactly repulsive."

David nodded in agreement, "I'd do it."

"Hmm. Save that topic of discussion for later, dear."

Kris ran through her warm-up piece. The Mozart. Until she was no longer fully aware of where her fingertips left off and the guts and wood and vibrant sound that now came from her instrument began. A real five finger workout, a light sheen broke on her forehead. She closed her eyes and lost her place in the world as she became the music, levitated within it as her heart kept time.

She loved the feel of it in her hands, stroking slowly, the sounds she coaxed...how it warmed to her touch, the instrument of her pleasure with its rich round golden tone...she held it delicately at first, but with growing determination and mastery as it grew to become a part of