

"They must be looking all over for you," Diana told her. "That was quite an auspicious debut. I've never heard the Liszt played with quite that much...elan. Needless to say--a revelation."

"I was playing for you," Kris admitted, eyes still aflame with passion.

"I felt it. Every stroke." They kissed again hungrily before parting reluctantly and walking separately back to the concert hall.

Ralph and David grabbed Kris the second she returned through the stage door and David handed off the case containing her violin. "Be careful," he said, "it's still smoking."

"It was like Metruchka dolls in a forced perspective, darling," Ralph opined "I could see old man Pagannini behind you with the devil on his shoulder fiddling for all they were worth just to keep up. Glorious. You have crossed over into the virtuoso zone. You'll be leaving us for the big time. There are several headhunters ready to pounce."

"I think I see one right now," Kris said under her breath as Calla caught her eye with a sharply pointed gaze that seemed to contain equal parts envy and malice. She sashayed across the crowding floor towards them.

Kris stiffened and David said, "You want me to run interference?"

"No. Save yourselves. I'm buoyant enough to face just about anything right now."

"All right," Ralph added, "But yell if you need a life preserver."

"Will do." They absconded gratefully and Kris had the sudden notion of standing on the african veldt facing down a charging rhino. 'Stand your ground,' she fortified herself, the remembrance of Diana's burning lips on hers didn't hurt at all in bolstering her courage.

"Simply stunning, darling," the insincere smile faded quickly as she appraised the shorter woman. "All that passion spent on a little bit of wood and catgut. Diana forgot the rest of us even existed. From our side of the rostrum it was positively indecent. I feel as though I need a shower."

"Glad you...enjoyed it," Kris said in a noncommittal tone.

Calla leaned in and whispered wickedly in her ear, "You want to know what she's really like in bed? Or have you discovered that already?" Pulling back from the insinuation, Calla meandered with the rest of the milling crowd in the general direction of the reception room. Kris took a deep breath. Time to shine. And rise to the occasion. Do a little tap-dance. And escape, finally, into the sheerest blue-eyed bliss.

Her avid emerald eyes restlessly searched the room as she entered angling for a certain dark-haired treasure. Kris was, however, unprepared for the quite spontaneous reaction as the crowd of musicians and well-wishers turned her way and applauded once again. She felt her face redden at the sudden unsolicited attention.