

startling few seconds as she approached them, but it was only a momentary challenge as her smile turned inviting once more. Kris had felt a not unfamiliar prickle along her spine at that look. And then her breath was almost knocked out of her as Diana sent a genuine glad-to-see-you smile her way.

Kris rasped, "Seem to have misplaced my drink."

Diana turned her dazzling smile on Calla. "Would you go find our bartender... if you don't mind."

Calla's quick avid eyes flickered over both of them. "Sure." And she was off to search out Ralph.

"Thank you," Diana murmured, further flustering her. "But she'll be back. She always comes back."

"She is...a bit...outgoing."

"Mm. That's a word for it. And thank you for the impromptu."

"Oh..."

"Vivace con brio. Very nice."

"Even though I lost my footing...uh, fingering?"

"Sorry. Shouldn't have been staring. But it had such a freshness--I had to see who was playing."

"I...uh, lose track, sometimes, of where I am."

"Mmm. Yeah, you had that transported glow--like a pre-raphaelite angel."

Kris knew she must've looked silly standing there with her mouth open, but her jaw muscles just would not work. Two compliments in a row. This wasn't supposed to be happening.

Maybe that drink had gone to her head. Maybe it was something else. She gazed, no, fell into those glorious blue eyes. Involuntarily, the words formed and were said before she could call them back. Later, she wondered what had possessed her. But for those blue eyes.

"My God," she heard her voice, "you're beautiful." Yeah, it sure sounded like her voice.

Diana didn't blink. Just darkened the crystal of those penetrating eyes somehow, quirked the corner of her mouth ever so slightly and murmured something that sounded like, "Mmm--hmm."

In a bizarre sort of Doppler Effect, the words that had tumbled so heedlessly from her lips, now entered Kris' hearing in all their embarrassing blatancy. The hot rush of blood began to color her features moving upwards from her neck.

"I didn't mean that," she panicked and stuttered, "I mean...I didn't mean to say that, you are...very..." Her hands fluttered in defeat. "Sorry. Excuse me." She made a hurried escape, knowing Diana must be grateful for that as well. Kris knew she was too on-the-surface at times, but that had been a major blunder. She decided to blame it on the demon rum.

"You're not leaving already?" David caught her trying to sneak out the door.

"Major faux pas. Let me get away quietly with a shred of dignity."

"What happened, honey? Did the big, bad--"

"She didn't do anything. It was me."