

her...responding to her every touch, the long graceful neck...the gently curving body...it was just like... She opened her eyes and found a pair of curious preternaturally blue ones hovering almost six feet off the floor and appraising her with the most unreadable regard she'd ever encountered as Diana filled the doorway.

Her hand continued to bow, but her fingers--and heart came to a complete standstill. To her credit she neither blinked nor lowered her gaze but met the ice blue head-on. She noticed an almost imperceptible upturn at the corner of the woman's mouth that might've portended the merest flicker of a smile.

"I don't think he notated it that way. You might want to try an F sharp." She lightly braced a hand on either side of the jamb and then was just as suddenly gone. Kris released the air in her lungs. As she left the room she passed through a lingering scent of perfume that clung round the doorframe. Her nose crinkled. Nice. She took a deep breath. "Wow. Wonder how long she was standing there?" There was no one else about for her to ask. She felt an unaccountable tinge of hot blood tingling at the tips of her ears. "Watch yourself, Kristina, don't let it rattle you." She thought back to her audition. But Diana had been out there in the dark watching then. Not big as life...and twice as--what? Kris had dreamed, last night and recurringly, of a big beautiful black panther, sleek as night, breathing down her neck, about to pounce. Well...we'll just see about that. But, oddly, the thought didn't frighten her. She found the prospect of a tussle rather exhilarating for some reason.

"It was the night of the long knives. They were out for her head. The big wigs were confirmed in their long-held opinion that the audience, women in particular, just did not want to see a woman conduct. The women will come and drag their sometimes recalcitrant husbands along only for a matinee idol, Arturo, Lenny, Ricci, Andre...and the 'bachelors,'" Ralph leered towards David with deeper meaning tucked inside his double entendre, "come for the same reason, a woman would be sheer anathema."

"But didn't she fight back? What about her contract?" Kris asked.

"No one knows the real details," David provided. "She took the demotion. And she's done better with it than anyone could have expected. She's developed a following. Personally, I think she'd rather play Miller than Mahler."

Kris chimed in, "Her interpretation of the Resurrection was magnificent. Bernstein couldn't have been any more exultant, transcendent. It was the most moving..." She trailed off when she caught Ralph and David exchanging a knowing glance. "Alright, I'm a fan. I know it. Now you know it."

"Old news," David smiled at her. "I think we had pretty much already figured that out."

"She should be here soon to grace us with her token appearance--almost Witching hour," Ralph noted with a wicked grin, "Until then--" he spun her round and gave her a tiny push, "mingle."

"She's a sweet kid."