

*that comprised the walk/ride/run area of the narrow park by the river...and her heart skipped a proverbial beat. There she was.* Standing alone at the railing, looking toward the Palisades. That proud profile lifted high, but with a deep aura of stillness that Kris somehow equated with a sadness beyond grief. It threatened to rend her heart. All those adolescent flutterings resumed, accompanied by fragments of romance poetry, Shelley and that ilk. Faces that launched lots of ships; women who walked in beauty wrapped in the night.

She couldn't sit by and watch this woman in pain. She moved. On instinct alone. Damn the consequences. Clearing her throat as she approached Diana--this was Manhattan after all--so as not to startle her, Kris launched herself into an apology. "Hi. Sorry about...earlier. I was a little...you know... Hoped you wouldn't think I was a mugger just now--"

"Didn't. Saw you sitting there, in one of your reveries, when I came into the park."

"Oh." Kris smiled brightly, a sudden light in the darkness. "And you didn't run in horror. Makes me feel better."

"Don't worry about it."

Kris released an easier breath than the one she'd taken.

"But--"

She took and held another.

"Don't let it happen again." Diana's voice had dipped to a low rumble timbre, full of darkness and warning. "Now. It's getting late. I'll feel better if you let me see you into a cab." The taller woman walked her over to the street and hailed a taxi for her.

"What about you?" Kris protested from the back seat.

"I'll be fine," Diana assured her, leaning momentarily at the open window, as she closed the door of the cab. And then she smiled with a supreme confidence borne of unshakeable self-knowledge...or mere bravado.

Kris wasn't at all sure which.

*The jungle. There was that breathing at her back, down her neck. She waited for it to envelop her and then...changing tactics, turned to meet it, opening her arms.*

Sunday. Go down and get The Times. Bring it back to bed. Maybe pick up some fresh bagels. With nova and cream cheese. Her foster parents in Ohio would be scandalized. Not a proper breakfast at all. Besides being too ethnic. Too New York. They'd always warned her about the place--too filled with every sort of vice imaginable and some that you couldn't--if you were a decent, white, normal person, that is. She couldn't wait to get there.

Here. She'd lucked into a sub-let at the high-rise towers in the heart of the theater district. Rent controlled. Maybe she'd take in a film this afternoon. She should practice, but she'd give the late-risers a bit longer to recover from their Saturday night debacles--such as her own--though it was wonderful living here--no one would ever complain--performers of every stripe, show albums at full blast, incessant piano scales, horns, cacophony was the word. The sounds rose from the open windows, the winding strains of composers, musicians, actors declaiming, riffs twining and mingling, out one window, breeze