

unspoken truce as they tucked in.

"You want another?" Calla referred to her empty glass.

"Too early in the day for that. And I exceeded my limit last night." Kris was relaxed, but on guard.

"Ah. That what got you into trouble?"

"Who said I was in trouble?"

"Hello, Diana." Calla beamed over Kris' shoulder.

"Very funny."

"Hello, ladies," the throaty voice intoned from behind and above. Kris' shoulder blades erected in a stiffened clench.

"Care to join us?" Calla offered.

"No. Thank you. Some of us have legitimate concerns to attend to." Diana began to walk on by, then paused, "and try not to be late to rehearsal tomorrow morning." She nodded, "Ladies."

Kris slumped in her chair. "Oh shit. How the hell--"

"She lives right around the corner. Didn't you know?"

"How would I know?" Kris saw a picture forming. Had this whole exercise been a fishing expedition? And she'd tumbled right into the net.

"Well, then," Calla rose, "I'll give you the tour."

The taller woman linked arms with her in a casual possessiveness that seemed thoroughly, maddeningly unselfconscious. She had no apparent qualms when it came to invading Kris' personal space. She walked Kris around the corner and pointed out the converted brownstone.

"The lair of the dark lady."

Kris smirked at the hyperbole.

"There's a charming little garden in back. You can't see it from here," Calla added with a wicked flourish.

Touche. Kris felt the jab as it zinged in under her defenses.

They kept walking and ended up on Spring street. Right in front of Les Femmes. And just as another couple, two women arm in arm, mirroring their forced pose, walked in to the establishment.

Calla turned innocent eyes on her, but couldn't disguise her less innocent smile. "Would you like to go in?"

"Not at the moment, no."

"Ah, you've been in here before?"

Game, set and match.

"If you have something you want to ask me, just go ahead and ask me."

The woman gave her a dazzling smile, "But, darling, where would be the fun in that?"

She could finally breathe again. Once she was safely back inside her apartment. Calla had obliquely suggested they stop by her place first, but Kris invoked something her fellow musician could not argue with--practice. So she begged off politely, but firmly and felt as though she'd gotten herself safely out of the woman's clutches. A few years before she might not have been so...choosy. The phone rang.

She was hesitant to answer this time. Almost allowing the machine to pick up, she interceded at the last second and grabbed the handset off its cradle.

"Hello?" she asked rather cautiously.

"You don't sound too sure," the smoky contralto replied.

Ohmigod. "Uh...hi...yeah...just got in."