

Was the woman checking on her?

Diana resumed speaking. "I was wondering..."

"Yes?" Kris felt her heart pounding.

"...if you..."

She could hear the rapid beating through bone conduction somewhere near her mastoid.

"...have been practicing the solo in the second movement?"

"The...Brahms?" she managed to squeak out.

"Something wrong?"

"Oh no, no, not at all. Should I be?"

"You might want to go over it before tomorrow."

"Sure. Will do. Does that mean I get to play it?"

"That means...you get to give it a go."

"Great. That's really great. I'll get right on it."

"Good. Tomorrow then." Disconnect.

A reward? For good behavior? What if I hadn't been here? Kris stood there holding onto the receiver until it began to loudly complain of the fact. Not a pleasant sound to a musician. She hurriedly replaced it.

The solo. Elegiac. Dark and moody. Not her personal style, but could she get into that, she could go there. Though she needed some inspiration first.

Kneeling by her stereo, she ticked down her CD collection. "Yeah. This is the one." Pulling a pillow from the couch she lay on the floor between the speakers.

The first strains of the Liebestod raised the golden down on her arms as she closed her eyes awash in the bittersweet melody of the music. The ultimate Romantic theme. The love-in-death. *Le petite mort*. It had always been near impossible for her to merely hear, or play, the notes as a mathematical construct. How could you remain dispassionate over such passionate music? And so she always read images into it. And this was narrative anyway. And this was lush...

She could feel herself floating on the emotion of it. Admittedly, the imagery of a love so great one would die for it, of a passion so intense the white-hot orgasm would sweep you away into a transcendent state of being were still beyond her grasp, but ever since she'd seen "Vertigo" a few years back, she'd had some points of reference for the feeling. The great film composer had inverted the Love-Death, stood it on its head like The Hanged Man in the Tarot revealing his open, bleeding heart. This was an aching wound, this love, but worth risking everything for. It went beyond physical attraction. There was an almost mythic quality.

Two souls communing, no, two halves of the same soul. Darkness and light entwined, an eternal dance, opposites drawn irrevocably together. How she would love to feel that for herself. She sighed. Remembering the graceful waltz of the camera, gliding a full 360 degrees around an embracing couple caught in an ethereal glow, the pulse of the music mirroring their hearts, their souls coming together, coming home.

She wanted to feel it, to know such passion, but she feared it too. Fire. So beautiful to behold...but if you allowed yourself to touch... Yet..."what a lovely way to burn" as the song says. She could see, could feel herself in the center of the maelstrom, still, yet spinning, strong arms wrapped round her, trembling, the power of this passion could lift up or destroy.