

## Tristan and Tristan

He sat back into his seat. They couldn't find a babysitter. His wife was at home with the kids tonight. He didn't mind. The orchestra tuned up. Knees bumped. He stood to let a couple pass. He recognized them. That was the beauty of season tickets: you got to know some of those around you. Especially when it was demanding, when you sat through the complete Ring, or some more obscure work of the early twentieth century, or even later.

He scanned the audience in well rehearsed, discreet turns of his head. She was there of course. By herself, a lone wolf, never found an encore, a partner a funeral pyre during all that time. He'd been watching her head and back for years, how the haircut changed but remained smart, short, lean and tantalising offering. A good ten rows lower but he loved that neck, the delicate polonecks stroking it gently, the way her head tapped to the music, leaning gently to onside as it waved over her. He could imagine her eyes following the baton as her tongue quavered in accompaniment.

The air conditioning was on but he still felt a hot flush. The atmosphere was thick with rich perfumes, the occasional rank of a quickly stubbed cigar, a glass of red wine trickling down before the bell rang for the opening sequence.

After the second interval people had appeared to fade. Tourists had decided they'd had the experience but didn't need to sit through all three acts. Wagner was not for the weak hearted. Tristan and Isolde should never be cut short, that defied the nature of their ambition, unblemished, perhaps for Wagner unfulfilled, forever unsavoured, true love on a pyre.

He checked wife and kids were ok during the second interval. Modern phones deleted the necessity for speech thank god. He had a wine and something to eat. A quick SMS covered his guilt. She never seemed to come to the bar.

Returning to his place he took a chance. There were empty seats all around and one just beside her. No one had occupied it all first act so highly unlikely they would turn up now. He realised he'd been planning the move all along. He

jumped up and skipped down the steps as the lights dimmed and the last violin fell into tune. His blood surged just as the opening notes whirled through a rising curtain.

He fell into place. She turned and smiled. The two men stared at each other in silence. The orchestra struck up. Gosh that was one for the books. Not even a daring production of Tristan and Isolde would have given the main roles to two men.

Their knees touched. Opera was about taking big chances, giant leaps of faith. They sat back and waited for Wagner to make it all right. Wagner complied.

He didn't even think about how he would explain it to his wife and as his hand clasped the one beside him he realized his partner hadn't worked it out either. As the lights went up they stood and clapped, and clapped, keeping the ovation going as long as possible before having to return to a world where the curtains never came down. He hoped he wouldn't be going home tonight. The timing wasn't just right.