

CHAPTER ONE

Music. It was Always About Music.

“Do you know how to sing a scale?” was all he asked. No introduction. No small talk. Not even the standard audition request of “So, tell me a little about yourself.”

I nodded my head and he began playing a C major scale. “Follow along and let me hear how you sound.” His fingers glided easily over the keys of the black Steinway. “Sing me an E,” he called out quickly changing from scales into a C major chord.

My voice sounded confident but I felt nervous. My gaze shifted from his fingers to the clock on the wall above his head.

He changed chords. “Can you pick out an A in this one?”

I sang an A.

Once again he changed chords. “Fine, fine. Now, listen carefully and give me a G.”

I sang a G.

“Great. Well, that’s it,” he said as he stood up, clapped his hands together glanced up at the clock. “I don’t need to hear any more.”

“That’s it?” My voice trembled. Panic had already set in. “You don’t want to hear any more? I can sing a solo if you want. I’ve got one all ready.”

He shook his head. “No. I don’t need to hear it. You’ll be fine.”

“Does this mean I didn’t make it?”

He smiled. “No. You have a nice voice. You’ll be a great asset to the choir.” He didn’t sound rude, just matter-of-fact. “Would you send the next girl in when you leave?”

I couldn’t move. Was that all there was to it?

He looked at me and smiled. “Yes?” It was more of a statement than a question. “That’s it. You did great.”

I tried to smile but already my lip was quivering. “Okay then,” I said as I once again nodded my head and walked out the door.

The next girl waiting in the hallway was someone I recognized from freshman orientation. “What’s he like?” She asked with nervous enthusiasm. “I heard he makes the audition really fun!”

I shrugged my shoulders, swallowed hard to keep from crying and stooped down to retrieve my books from the worn beige linoleum floor. “I don’t think he liked me very much,” I said. “All he asked me do was sing a scale and pick some notes out of a chord.”

“Do you think you made it in?”

“Yeah, he said I did. You’d better go in. He’s waiting for you and I think he’s in a hurry. I’ll see you back at the dorm.”

My audition was over and I’d been accepted into the student nurses’ choir. I should have been ecstatic. But I wasn’t.

I’d been counting on the choir audition to do what music had always done for my short seventeen-year-old life: save me.

Music. It was always about music.

I can't remember a time when music wasn't as important to me as breathing. I hear melodies in the rain. Symphonies sing in my head. Handel flows through my heart, Rossini and Puccini through my soul.

It began when my Sunday school teacher asked me to sing "Away in a Manger" in the church Christmas pageant. In rehearsal I did it perfectly, but on the night of the performance my five-year-old heart couldn't contain the excitement and I stumbled over the words in the second verse. Even so, by the time I'd finished the traditional Christmas hymn and the applause had died out, I knew I could sing. And in that flickering moment of time, my life-long love affair with music was born.

For the next six years I sang constantly. I sang in choirs at our neighborhood Lutheran church and choirs at school. I sang to myself and to anyone who'd listen. I dreamed up musicals and produced them in neighborhood basements.

But it all came to an abrupt end one day after school when my mother, weary of my never-ending musical concert, yelled up the stairs through my closed bedroom door. "Anne, will you just shut up? I'm sick of hearing you sing all the time!"

Like molten lava spewing forth from an erupting volcano her words burned their way into my heart as I calmly sat on my twin bed and picked the loose threads on my blue cotton chenille bedspread.

I kept the door closed. I didn't want to hear my mother's voice let alone look at her.

I cleared my throat and fought back the tears I was determined she would never see. “Why don’t you ever say anything to Sherry and Janie when they sing?” I asked convinced that my voice had not betrayed my secret pain.

“Because your sisters have lovely voices, that’s why. All the ladies in my church circle even said so. Besides, your new band director called yesterday and asked if we’d let you play a school instrument. They have something called an oboe. He said it was one of the most difficult instruments to play. I told him you were pretty good in music and I’d go along with anything to get you to stop singing.” And then she laughed. “So I guess it’s the oboe or nothing.”

I opened the door. “What’s an oboe?”

“Anne, if you want to do it, tell your teacher. They’re supposed to take care of everything.”

I didn’t care what I had to do to keep music in my life. If I had to learn how to play one of the most difficult instruments in the band, then that is what I would do. I went to the band room in my elementary school the very next day.

Fortunately for me, I fell in love with the oboe and it saved my musical life. Fascinated by its lonely, haunting sound, I practiced constantly.

Six months later when the band director asked my parents if I could study with the principal oboist from the Minneapolis Symphony, they astonished me by agreeing to his request.

But it wasn’t only the oboe that sang its siren song to me. The day my mother returned to the hospital to resume a full-time position in nursing, I was set free.

Free to blast my small records on our small green plastic phonograph in the corner of the basement, and free to belt out the latest hits by everyone from Theresa Brewer to Doris Day to Kay Star. When Elvis came onto the scene a whole new set of fantasies took over my adolescent musical life. With all the earnestness a twelve-year-girl could muster, I practiced his hip gyrating movements and dreamed of the time when Elvis would sing his love songs just for me.

With each passing day music drew me deeper and deeper in until it saturated my entire life. By the time I reached my senior year in high school, I'd convinced myself that someday I would be a famous singer or at the very least an oboist in the Minnesota Orchestra, and decided I would dedicate the rest of my life to music. I knew my parents would not be pleased, but still I thought I could garner some of their support. I was wrong.

"Ridiculous, Anne. This is absolutely ridiculous," was my mother's terse response. "You know perfectly well you're going to be our nurse."

I fought back. "You don't own me, you know, and it just so happens I don't want to be a nurse."

"Stop talking nonsense. Of course you want to be a nurse. I've known you were going to be the one to follow in my footsteps since the day you were born. Go ask your father if you don't believe me. He was the first person I told."

I knew my cherished dreams were evaporating with every word she spoke, and still I fought on. "Just because you love nursing doesn't mean that I will."

“Be as nasty as you want. Your father and I are in complete agreement on this. We’re not going to give you a dime for your college education unless you become a nurse. Besides, he intends to have a talk with you.”

Suddenly I felt my heart play leap frog deep in my chest. I hated to be forewarned of an impending discussion with my father. My father never discussed anything. He talked. You listened. And it was never good.

“About what?”

“About the excellent program the army has for student nurses.”

That evening I stared at my father in defeat. “You want me to join the army because they’ll pay my tuition, right?”

My father said nothing and his silence told me everything I needed to know.

“Well, I’m not going to join the army. I’ll get a job this summer and earn my own tuition to nursing school if that’s what it takes for me to get out of this house, but there’s absolutely no way you’re going to make me join the army. ”

“Fine, then. It’s settled.”

And it was.

Two months later, I returned my school-owned oboe to an empty band room and headed out to the football field where, along with the other 364 of my classmates, I graduated.

That fall I entered Northwestern Hospital’s School of Nursing in Minneapolis.

I chose Northwestern not only because they had accepted me in spite of my unexceptional grades, but also because of an intriguing sentence in their school brochure. “Our student nurses choir,” it read, “is highly respected for its level of

community involvement and is directed by the internationally known choir director, Bob Mansfield .”

If I have to go to nursing school, I thought, at least I'm going to go to one that has a choir.

But I was overwhelmed from the start. Science courses, a consistent problem for me in high school, continued to plague me and with each lecture I fell further and further behind. Too ashamed to admit to anyone I was in trouble, I told no one and long before the quarter had ended I was already drowning in a sea of potential academic disaster.

In desperation, I reached out to my roommate Ilene who from that moment on became my tutor, my confidant, my lifesaver and friend. Science made sense to Ilene and with her help it soon began to make sense to me. I did not soar to the top of the class, but I did accomplish one extraordinary event: I passed. And through it all, music remained my one solitary joy and comfort.

As a child the sound of my own voice lifted in song boosted my self-confidence and gave me hope, and it continued to do so during that long difficult freshman year.

The year I turned five and sang “Away in a Manager” in church, Bob had just turned twenty-two and was already under the mentorship of the famous choral conductor Robert Shaw.

By the time our paths crossed at the choir audition in the fall of 1961, Bob was thirty-four years old and considered by many to be the most successful choir director and entertainer the state of Minnesota had ever produced. He was, by reputation, charismatic, funny and famous.

The public adored him. He also happened to be the Minister of Music of the largest Methodist church in Minneapolis—and married.

The student nurse's choir wasn't scheduled to begin rehearsing until three weeks into the fall semester, and even though I knew I hadn't made much of an impression on Bob at my audition, I was eager for rehearsals to begin. Somehow, I thought as I walked into the choir room on the night of our first rehearsal, this man will live up to his vast reputation and I can prove myself to him.

And he did. Where once he'd been distant and distracted, he now oozed charm and told jokes. Where he'd been abrupt, he was now patient. Questions from choir members were treated with respect and humor. Difficult passages of music he made easy. The easy music he made fun.

It was a curious observation to many of the student nurses that he didn't look much like a traditional choir director. Standing six feet tall, he had thick, unruly black hair, and dark brown eyes that sparkled with mischief. And he was big. During rehearsal I heard one classmate gush, "Too bad he's built just like a linebacker. He'd be so handsome if only he were thinner."

But I thought he was handsome just the way he was. "I think he looks like a giant teddy bear," I whispered to no one in particular, "a giant teddy bear come to life."

By the end of the first rehearsal, I was committed to Bob and the choir completely. Over the next few months I grew to love his constant stream of jokes and the laughter that surrounded him. I adored his energetic directing and the sound of his voice. It wasn't long before every note he sang had literally wrapped itself around my heart. I wanted him to notice me. I ached to impress him. But even though I sang with

great passion, arrived early for rehearsals and often found a reason to stay late, nothing worked.

He was always overscheduled, and as I'd already discovered at my audition, when he was out of time he was out of charm.

There were a couple of times he looked at me as he passed out music to the choir. Casually, he'd ask me brief questions about where I was from and how I liked nursing, but that was it.

He certainly never gave me any indication that he was aware of me at all, which is why I was surprised and apprehensive when in March of my sophomore year, he asked me to stay after rehearsal.

"I want to ask you something," he said.

I watched as one by one the choir members said goodnight. As soon as the room was empty I blurted out , "You're going to ask me to leave the choir, aren't you?"

He looked confused. "Leave the choir?"

I started to stammer. "Because . . . because I missed the last two performances. Look, I had to work and I couldn't get . . ." I stopped midsentence and stared at the quizzical look on his face. "Wait a minute. I'll bet you didn't even notice I was missing. Did you?"

A look of understanding crept into his eyes. "Ah, no, I didn't. Look, Anne, I just wanted to know if you might be interested in joining another choir. I found out this morning that I'm short an alto in my choir that's going to tour Europe this summer and I thought you might want to go."

His request stunned me and my response, when it finally came out, sounded like a ridiculous high school cheer. "Yes!" I screamed with delight as I clapped my hands.

"Of course I want to go!"

He threw his head back and laughed. "Calm down. Calm down. The trip isn't free. Everyone has to contribute three hundred and fifty dollars, and there's lots of new music you'll have to learn. So maybe you'd like to take a couple of days to think things over."

"No! I don't need a couple of days to think it over. I've dreamed of going to Europe my whole life! I can't even believe you're asking me. This is so fantastic! I don't know where I'll get the money, but I know I'll get it somehow."

"Your family lives in Edina, don't they?" He said as he leaned over and grabbed the stack of music on top of the piano

"Yes." I answered automatically although I wasn't sure what that had to do with anything.

"So, your parents are probably rich," he added with a wink as he headed out the door. "They can probably help you out."

The article that *Time* magazine ran in the early 1960's said that Edina, Minnesota was one of the richest suburbs in the United States. If that was true, it was true for everyone but my family.

Returning from World War II a decorated war hero, my father bowed to my mother's demand to "get out of the army" and within one month retired from the active ranks as Lt. Colonel and joined the Army Reserves.

It was a decision with catastrophic consequences. He was a warrior skilled in battle, not a part-time soldier trained to live in peace.

From that day forward every job he held proved to be only temporary and over the years, he never let my mother forget how much her request had cost him.

Our move from the city of Minneapolis to the suburbs took place during a brief period of prosperity for my father. However, it soon became apparent that moving there was one thing and staying there was quite another. To the outside world our custom built five-bedroom home on an acre of land told everyone we were successful. No one would have believed we were poor, although with bill collectors on the phone and at the door that is exactly what we were.

Swearing me to secrecy, my mother admonished me daily not to say a word about our finances to anyone, and I never did. None of our well-to-do neighbors ever knew that nurse's training would serve as a dual purpose for my parents. My mother could fulfill her prophecy for my life, and it was the cheapest form of advanced schooling they could find.

Even though I doubted my father would have the money I needed for a tour of Europe, I thought he might know of someone who did. He didn't.

When asked, he was abrupt and to the point. "No, I don't know of anybody who will loan you the money. In fact, your mother and I aren't in favor of you going at all. You need to finish your training before you go gallivanting all over Europe."

My mother chimed in. "Quite frankly, Anne, I don't think you sing well enough to be a member of a choir that's going to tour Europe. I'm surprised you were even asked."

I didn't react to my mother's painful remark. I never did. The pact that I'd made with myself years earlier still held: I would never let her see how much her words hurt me. The more she struck out, the more determined I became to hide the pain.

In time, I found a way to defend myself and it drove her crazy. I simply stared at her. "Don't you give me that look of yours," she'd scream in fury and frustration.

And so, on that day, I sat rigid with practiced calm and stared at her.

"You know, Mother, you're probably right. I don't think I have that great a voice either, but I do pretty well in a choir, and if you won't help me out with this, then I guess I'll just have to find someone who will."

I asked everyone I knew for the money.

Eventually, the assistant director of nurses contacted a generous supporter of the choir and he agreed to give me an interest-free loan on the condition I pay it back within a year of graduation. I was ecstatic.

My mother was enraged. "Who gave it to you?" she demanded when I told her I had the money. "Who!"

I never told her. I didn't tell Bob, either. I decided to let him to believe the- if-you're-from-Edina-then-you-must-be-rich myth. In truth, I wanted to believe it myself.

It took weeks of extra rehearsal to prepare the choir for the trip, but by the time June arrived, we were ready. Between the sopranos, altos, tenors and basses there were twenty-eight of us traveling. I was the youngest.

Friends and relatives filled the terminal as we boarded the plane for Europe. Bob's wife Joan was among those waving goodbye. No one really knew why she wasn't going. I'd heard talk, of course.

Some said Bob and Joan didn't really get along and that if it hadn't been for their commitment to the church, they would've divorced long ago. Others said their marriage

was fine, but that Joan had been to Europe so many times, she decided to sit this one out.

Either way, I didn't care. The only thing on my mind that summer was having fun. When I heard the gossip about Bob's marriage, my only thought was, *So what? His marriage doesn't have anything to do with me.*

The tour was everything I had dreamed it would be and more. We sang Gregorian chants in the great stone cathedrals in London.

We performed impromptu gospel and popular American music concerts in outdoor restaurants and town squares of Italy, Germany and France. We were on television and written up in local papers.

We won choral contests and were featured performers in the International Music Festival in Wales.

And through it all, there was Bob.

Bob, who, from the minute the plane took off, did something he'd never done before. He noticed me. It started with simple questions. Was I excited about the trip? What cities was I looking forward to visiting?

As the tour progressed, so did his attention. He started to smile at me from the director's podium and wink at me as I left the stage.

Soon his questions became more personal. How were my room accommodations and did I get along with my roommates? What did I do on my free time and with whom did I spend it? At some point, a point I hardly dared acknowledge to myself, I knew I'd become special to him. And I liked it.

Five weeks later when our tour came to its scheduled end in Nice, France, I chose to spend the day alone on the beach. I didn't return until late in the afternoon and as I walked into the hotel lobby Bob fell into step beside me.

"Hey, Anne, you want to take the train to Monte Carlo tonight?"

His invitation shocked me. Bob had always made a great public display of how much he disapproved of smoking and drinking and naturally, I assumed this also included gambling. I didn't answer.

"Not to gamble," he added. "I just want to see what the casinos look like."

I was confused. "Aren't you supposed to be twenty-one?"

He gave me a wink. "Not if all you want to do is look."

Still I hesitated.

"Anne," he said with a shrug. "If you don't want to go just say so. But the next train leaves in forty-five minutes and if we're going to go, we need to be on it."

I couldn't make up my mind. A night in Monte Carlo sounded so exciting and yet .

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He started to chide me. "So, what do you think? Do you want to take a chance at living dangerously?"

I started to weaken. "Well, do you think we can make it?"

"We can make it if we hurry. Go change and meet me back here."

I caved in. "Don't leave without me!"

I ran past the hotel's ancient gold filigreed elevator and flew up three flights of stairs to my room.

Thirty minutes later, with my hair still damp from the shower, I threw on my white sundress, grabbed my navy blue cardigan, tore out of my room and made a mad dash for the lobby. We took off running as soon as I arrived.

The station turned out to be too close for a cab and too far to walk. We made it with only moments to spare. Bob purchased our second-class tickets, grabbed me by the hand and we jumped onto the train just as the doors closed behind us.

Staggering down the aisle, we collapsed into the first two available seats we could find. “That was fun!” I gasped as we both fought to catch our breath.

Bob looked at me and smiled.

“What? What is it? You’ve got a funny look in your eye. Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I’m looking at you with appreciation and joy, Anne. I happen to think you’re beautiful.”

For two long years I’d longed for this man to notice me. Just notice me. Now here we were riding a train to Monaco and he was he telling me I was beautiful. My cheeks burned with embarrassment. The palms of my hands felt moist with perspiration, but secretly I was thrilled. “Thanks” was all I could think to say.

Bob chuckled. “I tell you I think you’re beautiful and all you say is ‘thanks’? Anne, you either have tremendous confidence or you truly have no idea how pretty you really are.”

I shrugged and smiled, but remained silent. No one in my life had ever said I was beautiful. I was anything but beautiful. Responsible and reliable—yes. Beautiful? No. The evening had hardly begun and already I was enchanted.

Forty-five minutes later we stepped off the train into the magic of a Monte Carlo night. We strolled along the cobblestone side streets filled with small quaint shops and ate dinner at an outdoor café with tables covered in red-checkered tablecloths.

After an extravagant dessert of custard-filled crepes topped with caramelized sauce and whipped cream, we wandered over to the expansive marble steps leading to one of Monaco's beautiful casinos. I leaned into Bob, "This is amazing!" I whispered, as we entered the casino and walked over thick red carpeting woven into a rich floral tapestry and stared up at the immense chandeliers hanging from the vaulted ceilings. And it was. But, it was the sight of so many elegant-looking people standing around the gaming tables that left me fill with awe. The men, dressed in black tuxedos, wore an air of casual confidence like expensive aftershave, and the women who stood beside them sparkled with sophistication in long evening dresses of fuchsia and aqua, gold, green, and ivory. Envy and longing soon replaced my sense of awe. Not only did I want to look like the women wearing the jewel encrusted evening gowns . . . I wanted to be just like them.

Everything was happening so fast that at the time I wasn't even aware of it. But years later I knew. I knew that in that instant I'd decided to get rid of my old life. I was sick of it. I didn't want it anymore. My life was boring and insignificant compared to how I thought people lived their lives in Monte Carlo.

I didn't want to go back to Minnesota just to feel sad and overwhelmed all over again. I wanted a whole new life.

“Look at the diamonds that woman at the first table is wearing,” I said to Bob, who appeared to be as fascinated as I was. “I feel like such an idiot for wearing this stupid white cotton sundress.”

Bob tried to reassure me. “You look fantastic. These women are nothing compared to you.”

I smiled in vain. “I don’t think I’ll ever feel like these women. I always feel hopelessly out of place.”

He reached for my elbow and guided me from table to table on the casino floor, and it turned out Bob had been right; if you didn’t gamble, no one bothered you.

We’d worked our way to the other side of the room and were just about to leave, when three other members from the choir met us at the door and extended an invitation.

They’d rented a car, they said, and were driving back to Nice. Did Bob and I want to ride back with them? If they were surprised to see us together they didn’t indicate it and I was so happy with their invitation that it never occurred to me to ask how big the car was. By the time I realized that in order to make everyone fit in the small green Citroen, I had to practically sit on Bob’s lap it was too late to back out. I worked my way into the back seat and oozed my body in close to Bob’s.

At first I thought that sitting so close to him would make me feel uncomfortable, but from the moment I experienced the warmth of his body the only thing I felt was safe. See, I thought as my body pressed in close to his, *he really is a giant teddy bear come to life.*

As the smell of the sea air rushed through the open car windows, joy, singing, and laughter quickly drenched the star-filled night.

Too soon, I thought as we sped down the cliffside coastal highway. *This night is coming to an end too soon.*

Once back in Nice the hotel lobby quickly filled up with returning choir members all trying to squeeze one more hour out of the night.

Along with many of the other singers, I had harbored hopes that Bob would tell us that there'd been mistake on the itinerary. We all wanted him to hear him say there was one more concert to perform. One more city to visit.

No one, it seemed, wanted the tour to end, but to everyone's dismay, within a few short hours it did just exactly that. And it made me nervous.

Real life was about to descend upon me and I knew I didn't want mine anymore.