

Chapter 10 – Frank & Alice

My piano player Jordan is one of the most loving people I know and sometimes his huge heart makes him agree to accept some less than desirable gigs. He's booked a gig for us to play a midday show in a retirement home.

We are led with our equipment to the cafeteria. Metal chairs painfully squeal when moved across the pock marked 1960's linoleum floor. The mirrored wall at the back will surely echo our every high note. It smells of cleaning fluid, mold and burnt bacon.

For the first few songs, I merely go through the motions of singing. I resist the urge to check the clock between every chorus. A few seniors are dancing. A well-dressed couple gets up and takes over the dance floor. His trousers are pressed down the seam, his Oxfords polished to a high shine, and he wears a snappy patterned vest and matching tie.

She is all in cream; a blouse with billowy sleeves and a light airy skirt that falls to her knees. Her heels, old but well polished, form perfectly around her feet. He expertly guides his lady with his hand flat on "between her shoulder blades. He signals a change

of direction by the positioning of his hand on different parts of her back. He never leaves her unsupported; forward and back, forward and sideways, a little twirl here and there, all interspersed with intricate, almost balletic moves by the lady. They've been doing this a long time.

They effortlessly shift from tango to foxtrot to waltz. It's beautiful. As I'm singing, I am fascinated by this couple. How many years did this take to perfect? Now, I sing with feeling. I don't want to disappoint them. The other residents gather around them and applaud at the end of each song. Jordan peppers his solos with more and more intricate notes and chords. I encourage his solos to go on for much longer than usual and we play a half an hour over the booking time. We finally wind down when I see the activities director signal us from the corner of the room.

I roll up my microphone cord and pack the music stand. I stand there with Jordan and accept the thanks and compliments from the audience. Then I notice the couple at a table, the lady looking particularly tired. I walk over to say a special goodbye to them.

“You were amazing to watch. Thank you for making this so much fun!” I say as I approach their table. The man turns to me, and stands. He smiles as he shakes my hand.

“That was lovely. It’s nice to meet you. I’m Frank. I particularly liked the French standards. They’re a nice change, hearing our favourite melodies in a different language.”

“Thank you Frank. You have obviously been dancing together for many years. Have you done many shows or competitions?” I ask.

“Oh yes. Alice and I have been together for over fifty years. We met at a dance competition at the Palace Pier in 1947. We went to all the dance halls and won a lot of ribbons. We saw Guy Lombardo many times, and Fred Culley and Howard Cable, and did you ever hear of Moxie Whitney?”

“I’ve heard of Guy Lombardo, but I don’t know the others.” Then I speak to Alice. “You are a beautiful dancer. You stole the show today!” But Alice doesn’t answer. She’s staring straight ahead.

Frank takes me gently by my elbow and steers me away from the table. He leans in and says, "I must be getting Alice back to our room. She hasn't spoken in many years but when we dance, her body remembers. Thank you so much for today. I got my Alice back for a while."

He turns away and helps Alice up from her seat. He puts her arm through his, and together, they walk out.