

FRAN ANNAFORD

If Time Were Not A Moving Thing

Starnberg Series: Book 1

Sample excerpt

Friday morning was warm. Arabella had no intention of arriving hot and sweaty, so she took an early tube to get her to the opera house in plenty of time. She went first to an empty studio and warmed up her fingers. She wanted to play at her best on Swedish TV.

She followed up with a visit to a staff cloakroom where she carefully refreshed her make-up, adding just a little more kohl. She knew that TV cameras put on ten pounds in weight and made a person look washed out. She used foundation, as she didn't want to run the risk of pink cheeks.

She had on fairly tight black jeans, a black sleeveless t-shirt, and her anthracite linen jacket, freshly ironed. Low heels completed the outfit. Her stilettos would have been much more elegant, but she remembered Marie had said to be natural, and who wore three-inch heels to coach a Grieg song?

She opened the door to the rehearsal studio. Lights and two cameras were being set up around the Steinway. She did not see Marie, so decided not to walk over to the piano, but stayed just inside the room, leaning against a table near the door, until Marie came in, deep in conversation with a good-looking man in his thirties. They were speaking Swedish.

Marie wore elegant grey trousers, and a button down fitted silk shirt in a slightly darker colour. The top buttons were undone, revealing a hint of her generous cleavage. Her hair was in a chignon. Arabella felt a flutter move southward. She moved slightly to attract attention, and they both turned. Marie's eyes went darker and she coughed.

"Sven, this Arabella... my pianist. Arabella, Sven, our director." Sven's eyes moved up her body onto her face.

"Are your eyes really that blue, or are you wearing contacts?"

"Yes, I am. I thought my reading glasses would reflect the lights. Or so I was told once when I did a TV interview."

Marie cut in. "But I can assure you her eyes really are this colour." Arabella was damned glad she had used foundation. She felt her cheeks flare.

"You are a beautiful woman. I'm happy we can work together."

"Sven...down boy." Marie made light of the situation, but Arabella could see she was far from pleased. *How interesting.*

"Ladies, take up you positions please. Let's film a complete version of the first song, then you can pretend to work on it, or even better, actually work on it."

Marie handed Arabella the music for two of the songs Grieg wrote in German to texts by Heinrich Heine. She turned to Sven.

"I don't hold out much hope for a good first take. We haven't ever worked on them together. But we can try."

Arabella opened the photocopies out wide on the piano. Luckily, she wouldn't need to turn the page.

"Tempo?"

Marie indicated with her hand what she wanted, and Arabella began playing *Zur Rosenzeit*. They were filming with two cameras. One of them was trained on her, and the other on Marie who stood in front of the piano behind a music stand on which she placed a second copy of the songs.

Arabella had played the songs some years previously for a graduate student in college, and she found she remembered them almost perfectly. It meant that she could look at Marie most of the time, only glancing occasionally at the music. Marie looked at her as well, as she knew the texts by heart. They were immediately on the same wavelength.

Arabella could follow exactly when Marie wanted to breathe or to hold a note a little longer. It was an almost perfect rendition of the song and would normally have been achieved only after many hours of practise together.

"That seemed pretty good to me," said Sven.

The spell broke and Marie said drily, "Try to top that...anybody."

They began a filmed working session, in which Marie asked for a slightly different tempo in a phrase, or Arabella corrected a note or a pronunciation. It was totally unnecessary, and only for the cameras, but they did it. Then they sang and played a full take of the second song, *Ein Traum*, and the same thing happened. They simply gazed into each other's eyes and made perfect music together.

"This time, I would like a different camera angle. Marie, could you go around and stand behind Arabella. Look over her shoulder."

Marie did and they began working. Arabella was now tense. She could feel Marie's warmth behind her back and smell her scent.

"That's good. Now, Marie, can you please lean over Arabella's shoulder. I want a shot of your heads together. The black and blonde hair contrast is really wild." Arabella felt a line of sweat trickling between her breasts.

"Phew, it's so hot in here. It's the lights. I'm afraid my hands will slip on the keys."

"You can take your jacket off, if you are decent underneath." There was no mistaking the slight leer. "We'll film you taking it off, otherwise there is a continuity problem. Ready?"

Arabella slipped out of her jacket and threw it on to a chair next to the piano stool. Marie leaned over her shoulder and pointed to a phrase in the music. She put her other arm around Arabella's back and her hand skimmed softly and slowly down Arabella's left arm, until it rested on her bicep.

She coughed slightly as if she had choked on her own saliva. Arabella clamped her thighs together. She was so turned on she thought there would be a puddle where she sat. But Marie was the consummate professional, and they played the scene; Arabella even noting things in pencil on the page, which she thought was a brainwave, and would make the take look more convincing.

“I think we have everything we need. We can wrap it there. Marie, please come with us. We need some shots of you at the front of the opera house and walking around to the stage door. And another one in the corridor, arriving at your dressing room. You have brought the outfit you want to wear tomorrow, haven’t you? It will have to match with giving autographs after the performance. Arabella, thanks a million.”

She felt dismissed and picked up her jacket. She handed the music back to Marie and turned to go. Marie hurried after her. “Wait,” she took hold of Arabella’s arms and turned her, looking into her eyes. “Thank you so much,” she said softly and kissed her lightly on both cheeks.

Her hands lingered on Arabella’s biceps, and she took in a breath. Arabella was sure she heard an appreciative hum, before she was released.

“Are you coming to the performance tomorrow?”

“I’m sorry I can’t. I have a dinner date.” She was meeting her cousin, a journalist who edited a small magazine. Marie’s face closed down and her expression was inscrutable. The cameras and crew made for the door, and Arabella hurried away, slipping her jacket back on. She had goose bumps all over her arms, but they burned where Marie had held her.