***Chapter 5***

**Gilbert Fabre learned his fate the following Tuesday. He’d not worked in the city bureaucracy for almost 3 decades not to react viscerally to the crude insensitivity of the letter’s awkward prose. He found it hard to remind himself that it was just a form letter, one however filled to the brim with preset phrases seemingly designed to give solace, yet which were bound to have the effect of affronting his dignity:**

 ***“No criticism is implied of your abilities or musicianship”*, so began the second paragraph of the letter, *“There was an overabundance of highly qualified talent”*. These clichés were unfortunately followed by the clincher: “*This is not to discourage you, and we sincerely hope that you will be able to find some satisfactory musical involvement at your level. Persevere in your studies, and we hope that, sometime in the future you will have the confidence to come back and try again.*”**

 **Somewhere further down there was the phrase, “*The Philadelphia Orchestra’s high performance standards are legendary, and …*”, but Fabre didn’t need to read that far. The moment he walked into his office the next morning he put in a call to Susan Spiegel. She wasn’t in but was expected back around 11. He could leave a number and she would get back to him. Between the hours of 11 and 1 he called back again 4 times. Finally, at 1:30 his office phone rang.**

 **“Hello. This is Susan Spiegel. May I speak with Mr. Fabre?”**

 **“This is he. You probably know why I’m calling.”**

 **“No sir, I’m sorry I don’t. I deal with lots of people every day.”**

 **“I auditioned for the chorus last week. I received a letter in the mail yesterday morning saying that I’d been turned down.”**

 **“Yes, Mr. Fabre. Only a few positions were available, and there were many qualified applicants.”**

 **“Miss Spiegel, you may not remember this, but you specifically told me that you were interested in having someone in the Chorus who is a native speaker of Catalan.”**

 **“Oh yes – now I remember you. I don’t know why you weren’t accepted. Have you had previous musical experience?”**

 **“Miss Spiegel. It’s written on my application that I’ve got a vocal degree from the Philadelphia Musical Academy.”**

 **“Oh, I see. I did mention to Mr. Falcone that you spoke Catalan. If you like I can talk to him again. “**

 **“Yes, Miss Spiegel, I would appreciate that very much. When can I call you back?”**

 **“Today is Wednesday. I should be seeing him tomorrow or Friday. Why don’t you call me back on Monday morning and I should have something for you.”**

 **As it turned out, he was unable to reach her until the following Wednesday at around 3 in the afternoon.**

 **“Hello. This is Susan Spiegel. Whom am I speaking to?**

 **“Yes. This is Mr. Fabre again. Mr. Gilbert Fabre. You do remember who I am, don’t you?”**

 **“Yes, Mr. Fabre. I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but Mr. Falcone will be away for two weeks. It doesn’t look as if you’ll be able to sing with the chorus this year.”**

 **“Is there any chance I can speak to him briefly when he returns?”**

 **“Mr. Fabre, that’s just about impossible. He won’t have a minute to spare between his return and the beginning of the season.”**

 **“I intend to try anyway.”**

 **“Good luck, sir, but my honest opinion is that you’ll be wasting your time.”**

 **For the next month Fabre kept in touch with the Philadelphia Orchestra’s office almost daily, determined not to miss the day of Aldo Falcone’s return; but even after he returned he was never in. Fabre left over a dozen telephone messages, yet never got a call back on any of them. He was tempted to go down to the orchestra’s offices, hoping to catch him, but there was never any time to spare from his work. By then his burning anger at being snubbed far exceeded any real desire to sing with the chorus. He’d never listened to so much as a bar of Casals’ “El Pessebre” .**