

Chapter 7

Vallee Views

He Played the Part by Heart

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Our wedding portrait.

When I looked up and saw a handsome man in a tuxedo, holding a violin, my fate was sealed. I was an usher at Boettcher Concert Hall in Denver and Paul was Principal Second Violin.

At the end of the concert, I was stationed at the edge of the stage until the patrons left the hall. He told me later he had watched me showing patrons to their seats for several weeks and waited for an opportunity to start a conversation.

Shortly after we started dating, Paul auditioned for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and I pretended to be happy when he got in, but I was devastated. He would be moving to Los Angeles to start the summer season at the Hollywood Bowl.

We had six months before he left. We both knew a long-distance romance would eventually fizzle, so we made the most of the time we had. On the night he left, in the middle of the most intense embrace I have ever experienced, he said, "I have to see you again."

I felt relieved that it wasn't over but unsure of how we could move forward. He was Jewish and I wasn't. After graduating from Yale music school (and playing in the Santa Fe Opera during the summers), he dated many women who were as equally accomplished as he was. I married my high school sweetheart, dropped out of college and started a family, and then got divorced after nine years of marriage. We were an unlikely couple. Still, we had a deep bond that we didn't want to break.

I went to visit him in Los Angeles after he got settled in an apartment in Brentwood. I grew up in the Midwest and had never seen the ocean, so we went to the beach and watched the eternal waves slapping at the shore, seeming to mock our tenuousness.

We had breakfast at Café Casino and sat on the patio with a view of the Pacific. The talk began to include discussions of marriage.

The freeways were intimidating, and I got a crash course in Thomas Brother's maps. I had to get used to actually seeing the air as well as breathing it, a mix of fuel and salt air that stung my nostrils. I loved the palm trees and exotic plants that were mixed with ancient oak trees. We took the obligatory drive through Beverly Hills and walked along Rodeo Drive.

Could I live here? Coming from Denver, I was a Rocky Mountain snob and could see what Angelinos called "mountains" when the smog lifted.

Then I looked into Paul's eyes and knew that my future was there. More marriage talk ensued. His parents said they would disown him if he married out of the Jewish faith. I had to consider introducing my children to a stepfather. When we were dating in Denver and I wasn't sure of our future, I didn't have my children, ages 5 and 8, spend much time with him.

My first time at the Hollywood Bowl was magical. It cannot be fully experienced until you actually sit in the audience and feel its immense scale. As the sun sets, a cool breeze comes up. I loved watching hi playing with the other musicians, making great music.

One night, towards the end of my visit I found my seat at the Bowl and gazed down at the stage as the orchestra tuned up. I had a bottle of wine, drank too much of it, and contemplated the obstacles that seemed insurmountable. Then I walked down the steep walkway to the backstage area to see him at intermission. I watched his face light up when he saw me in the crowd. I knew then that I loved him and wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.

I went back to Denver, and we experienced a rocky period that included a broken engagement, reconciliation, and another engagement that ended with him breaking it off for good. We were both miserable. A few months later he reached out after I sent him a kiss-off letter and we were married at Denver City Hall eleven days later. That was 36 years ago.

When my children and I moved to Los Angeles in June of 1982, Paul and I took them to Disneyland right away. My new husband parented Autumn and Ben with an open heart and loved them as his own. Their father moved from Denver to San Diego, so Autumn and Ben had a trio of parents. We now have three beautiful grandchildren.

Paul recently retired from the Los Angeles Philharmonic. On his last night at the Hollywood Bowl, I sat in the audience, as I had so many years ago, and was abundantly grateful that I took a chance on love.