

The Love Lock



A Suspenseful and Sensual Love Story

Eichin Chang-Lim

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by
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(The misspelling of the title is intentional. I hope that does not irritate you.)

To all the people who are fighting the silent battles rampaging within them.

“I wanted to tell her that if only something were wrong with my body it would be fine, I would rather have

anything wrong with my body than something wrong with my head, but the idea seemed so involved and wearisome that I didn't say anything. I only burrowed down further in the bed." ~Sylvia Plath

"The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames." ~Virginia Woolf

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Prologue

May 2008. San Diego, California

“Hey, Cheetos,” said Dylan, calling her by the nickname that always made her toes curl. “Let’s get the hell out of Dodge for the day.” He lounged against her dorm room doorframe in his carefree way, a roguish grin on his face.

“I’m there,” she replied without hesitation. Somehow Dylan always brought out her spontaneous side in a way no one else could. She loved feeling so liberated. He was her sense of time, her compass. Moreover, the best part? She didn’t even worry about time or direction with him. They existed outside the realm of structure.

Soon they were on the highway, blasting Californication from Dylan’s ancient car radio. With that, they traveled down the 5 Freeway South. Mission Bay Park sprawled before them, with the vision of vivid green grass and the rippling blue waves punctuated by palm trees. Then, the breathtaking view from Del Coronado Bridge. From high above the bay, Violet noted the strange contrast of navy warships and the lackadaisical sailboats that floated by with no agenda.

How strange that this bridge to their blue sanctuary was also an instrument of destruction as the third deadliest suicide bridge in the United States, seventh in the world. Violet reminded herself.

Why am I even thinking about this, she thought, imperceptibly shaking her head. Her mind always managed to locate the darker shade, even in the midst of something overwhelmingly beautiful.

She forgot her thoughts after they crossed. Dylan released his right hand from the wheel and laced his fingers through hers.

Violet thought she knew where they were headed: The Hotel del Coronado! They'd only been there a few times, but each time had been special. Soon, the signature three-tiered, red-pointed roof came into view, piercing the placid sky. Violet had a feeling Dylan would whisk her to their favorite spot.

She loved the old-world elegance of the hotel, not to mention its impressive Tinsel town history. Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin, Mae West... they'd all stayed there. It's easy to see why: the beach is enchanting, with baby powder-white sand and splendid views.

Getting out of the car, they blinked in the blinding May sun. The boardwalk was swarming with tourists as usual. Violet kicked off her flip-flops before they walked through the expanse of white sand, hand in hand. The wind tousled her hair affectionately.

Finally, they came upon a patch of shoreline that was less dense with people. It was then, when she lay down in the sand, Violet could focus on the perfection around her. The blue sky framed with the scene before her calmed Violet's soul. Then Dylan removed his hoodie (revealing strong arms) and extracted the box from his pocket.

He held it out to Violet. "Go on, open it," he urged.

"You shouldn't have," she said in her best southern drawl. Nevertheless, when she opened the black box, there was no joking. Sitting within it was a silver chain with a heart-shaped lock. Beside it was a key, about half the size of her pinky finger, hanging from another chain.

"Wow," Violet said. Then she noticed something on the key. "Is there an engraving on this?" She answered her own question, "'One heart.' This one is your half, isn't it?"

"Look at the locket," Dylan replied.

““One love,”” Violet read aloud, running her finger over the engraving. “This is beautiful.” She grinned mischievously at him. “I’ve never seen you do something so cheesy, but I’m glad you did.”

Dylan laughed. “You make me do cheesy things, Cheetos.” He leaned in, draped the necklace around her neck, giving her a kiss before fastening it. The heart lock nestled comfortably in the dip of her collarbone. Dylan donned his own necklace, which hung low enough that it could easily be concealed by his T-shirt. She circled her arms around his neck.

“So you have the key to my heart,” Violet whispered into his ears.

“Literally, now.” Dylan grinned.

“In every sense.”

“And,” In his quickened heartbeats, Dylan responded, “I hope I always do.”

“Always.” Their lips met and lingered. His mouth slowly traveled downwards.

She wanted more.

“How I love you, Cheetos.”

PART ONE

Chapter 1

April 1995, Suburban San Diego

Violet shushed her sister and pulled the comforter over their heads as their mother, Wanda, opened the bedroom door and peeked into the room. The girls tried unsuccessfully to stifle their giggles.

“Alright, my little criminals,” their mother teased. “What mischief are you into now?”

She walked over and pulled the blanket down a little to reveal a mop of tousled chestnut hair. She gave Amber a kiss on the top of her head. Violet peeked over the blanket with twinkling eyes like amethysts.

“What are you doing in your sister’s bed, you little scamp?” Wanda asked and then, grinning. She began tickling Violet until she was screeching and squirming and begging for mercy.

“Stop, stop!” she cried.

“Okay,” their mother finally relented. “Off to your own bed.” She gave Violet a playful slap on her bottom as she jumped out of the bed and raced across the room to her own bed.

“Dad and I will be back soon. Gilecia is downstairs if you need anything.”

Amber reached up, circled her arms around her mother’s swan-white neck, and murmured, “I love you, Mommy. Where are you going?”

“I love you too, sweetheart. We’re going to a party. Go night-night now, girls.”

She stood to go. “And *please* be nice to your sitter. Violet, that means you.”

Their mother gently closed the door. Her footsteps faded. Violet sat up. Amber’s bed was on the opposite wall. The room warmly lit by the pink Disney Tinkerbell night-light by the center nightstand. On the far corner of the room were a pile of packages with dolls, new dresses, and other girlish fancies from their seventh birthday party earlier that day. The glow-in-the dark star stickers scattered on the ceiling gave the room a whimsical mood.

Violet turned to her sister. “Hey! Amber! Let’s go play.” Violet jumped out of bed, tiptoed to flip on the overhead light.

“What do you wanna do?” Amber asked nervously. Although she was twenty minutes older than Violet, she tended to be the more cautious child. Amber was the sweet princess, while Violet was “Little Miss Independent” as their mom affectionately put it. They looked alike. However, their parents named them after their eye colors. Amber had golden light-brown eyes; Violet had the lavender eyes.

“Look at our new stuff!” Violet said. She flopped herself down on the ground by her heap of loot. Amber shimmied out of bed and sat alongside her to examine their gifts. Their favorite was the Barbie Doll Chef set. They both jumped to play with it immediately. But Violet quickly grew bored and looked about for more late-night shenanigans.

“Amber, I got an idea,” Violet said. “Dad just got another clock from the store to fix. I want to fix it up for him! I know how to do it. We can play with the dollhouse later.”

Amber seemed to have a mixed opinion. “I don’t know,” she said, “Gilecia can hear us.”

Violet rolled her eyes. Sometimes she wished Amber wasn’t such a baby. “Don’t worry. She is downstairs and

she always just sits there and watches TV. Besides, Mom told her we were sleeping.”

Violet sprang up and stealthily exited the room. She crept past the living room, keeping her eyes on the babysitter’s drowsy head bobbing back and forth as she fought sleep. Soundlessly, she made her way down the hall to her father’s office, where the French brass antique alarm clock sat.

One of their father’s hobbies was collecting old antique clocks and refurbishing them. Violet had knelt next to him many-a-day, watching him open up the panel, remove the insides, “the guts” as he called them, and put them back together again in a superior form. She was eager to try it.

Her dad just brought this fancy one home from an antique store that afternoon. The clock and tools were on a tray. One day it would sit proudly on the mantel, but Violet knew she could speed up the process. In only a minute, she returned to her room with the project.

The sisters beheld the clock, brassy but immaculately shined, with the fancy Roman numerals on the face. *Dad will be so proud when I show him.*

“Are you sure you can put it back together?” Amber asked with concern.

“I know how to do it. I’ve seen it a zillion times. Just watch.” Violet placed the clock face down and attempted to open the back panel with a small jeweler’s screwdriver while Amber watched.

“I don’t want you getting into trouble, Violet,” Amber said with pleading eyes. “Why don’t you wait for Dad and he can show you how?”

“No way,” said Violet stubbornly, yanking the back panel open and gutting the inside components. The whole *point* was to do it herself. “I got it.”

When Violet set her mind to something, she would see it through—no matter what.

* * * * *

The twins hugged pillows half lying on the light-tan plush carpet watching the *Lion King* video. Violet glanced back at her mother nesting on the off-white leather sofa still on her burgundy satin robe. The fragrance of coffee from her cup permeated the room. Her mother's lightly wavy butter-blond hair fell over her shoulder catching the morning light from the window. People always commented that she had her mother's hair, and she was proud of it.

My mother is so pretty. Violet bounced up and sprang to her mother.

"How was the party last night? Mommy." She squeezed next to her mother. Amber joined in.

Wanda laid the coffee cup down on the side table and pulled both girls into her arms. She gave them a brief account of the party. However, the events of the night before replayed in her head in detail.

* * * * *

What happened at the party the previous night...

"Here you go," Wanda's husband, Aidan, handed the keys of his Mercedes to the valet parking attendant and turned to the passenger side of his vehicle. He extended his arm, Wanda's bejeweled hand gently accepted. Wanda extended her right leg, and at that angle under the lustrous porch lights of the establishment, she was aware of her husband's burning sight. He was peeking at her porcelain breasts under the V-neck of her red dress. Her onyx, beaded necklace with matching earrings perfectly completed the look. Her husband always told her that she still turned him on even after all these years.

After graduating from Yale Law School, Aidan Swanson became a criminal defense lawyer and a successful one at that, having won a major drug trafficking case and earning his solid reputation. He ran a successful law firm with three partners and was active in the local

Lion Club charity functions. On that particular night, he and Wanda were attending the Lion Club officer installation and new member initiation dinner at a classy Italian restaurant.

The host recognized them immediately and nodded at them. "Welcome, Mr. and Mrs. Swanson. This way." They followed his crisp white-jacketed figure as he guided them to a large private room. Aidan had one arm protectively circled around Wanda's waist.

Upon entering the reserved room, Wanda beheld the opulence of the evening. Fresh-cut flowers sprung from dual-handled Italian ceramic vases with an antique finish as the centerpiece on all nine round tables. A lion head fountain gave off a soothing, tinkling sound in the corner, while people mingled and swayed to the soft classical music floating in the air. It felt like socialites arriving at an opera house.

Wanda's face turned as she spotted Kendra waving to her. She was in a sunbeam-yellow gown. Wanda leaned into Aidan, whispered, "It looks like her hair had grown out since last time," when fine brunette baby hairs were only just starting to sprout from her head.

"You look stunning, Kendra," shouted Wanda, grinning ear to ear. The two women embraced. The warm colors of their dresses were making them appear like a single ember of fire. Aidan came forward, shook the large hand of Gordon, Kendra's husband, and gave him an encouraging light pat on the shoulder.

The family had a friendly professional relationship. Aidan had provided Gordon Purcell and his family legal advice for his accounting and personal financial management firm, which had earned its reputable standing and acquired some major local establishments as clients. Gordon was known for his integrity, trustworthiness, and diligence in his work. As his wife battled repeated miscarriages and ovarian cancer over the last two years, he

stood by her side whenever needed, always ready to support her through the valleys. Even though his personal life was turbulent at times, his business grew steadily with a cohesive team under his leadership.

The waiter came around taking the drink orders.

“I’m feeling festive. How about a Cosmopolitan?” Wanda said, smiling like she had decided to do something mischievous.

“Merlot,” Aidan said.

“Make that two,” Gordon said.

All eyes moved to Kendra. “Cranberry iced tea,” she replied. Gordon took her hand in his and gave it a light squeeze.

* * * * *

While men centered their conversations on business, the two women exchanged their tales and travails of motherhood until Kendra finally brought up the elephant in the room: the subject of her ovarian cancer.

“Doctor said I was cancer free in my last checkup, and my chemotherapy worked out well for my particular case.” She paused before adding, “Chemo was hell. I couldn’t be happier to be done with that.”

“I can only imagine,” Wanda said softly. “And having a child makes it so much harder, I’m sure.”

“I’m not afraid of dying. I do just worry about Dylan—he’s still so little. The thought of not being able to see him grow up is the hardest part.” Kendra’s eyes glittered with the formation of tears.

“Oh, I’m sure. But everything will be all right. I’m sure of it.” Wanda extended her arms and gave her companion a hug.

The servers delivered delicate appetizer plates to each individual. On each plate sat three large shrimps gathered around a heap of cocktail sauce. The other plate contained an array of appetizers shaped in a flower-like formation,

with crab-stuffed mushrooms, prosciutto-wrapped mozzarella, creamy artichoke bruschetta, baked stuffed clams, and Italian rice balls, or “arancini.”

Lifting the utensil, Wanda appeared in deep thought about which item to attack first. Kendra stared at the plate absent-mindedly before continuing the conversation. “How nice that your twins will always have each other. I so wish Dylan had that.”

Wanda knew Kendra felt guilt about her condition, even as illogical as that was. Wanda would hate to think she couldn’t provide for her children; she needed her utmost strength so her children could lean on her. But even if she couldn’t, it eased her soul that the children had each other when she and their father were long gone from this world.

Poor Kendra, Wanda thought as she chewed on a juicy shrimp.

* * * * *

“Mom, what are you thinking?” The twins’ voices brought her back from her reverie. She pulled them in and hugged them tightly. The music of *The Lion King* filled the background.

Chapter 9

New Year's Eve 2009, Palm Springs

“What do you think about spending New Year’s Eve and New Year Day in Palm Springs?” Dylan suggested.

“Absolutely!” Violet was excited. Palm Springs was one of her favorite vacation spots. The picturesque spa town sat at the corner of the desert and was framed by rugged mountains. Romantic didn’t begin to describe it. It would be the perfect place to spend their final winter break in college. Violet couldn’t believe how fast the years had flown by. It seemed like just yesterday they had been freshmen, and now they were staring graduation in the face.

“Great,” he said, flashing his rakish grin. “I’ll take care of all the details. Prepare to be impressed.”

They arrived on New Year Eve’s morning. The first thing they did was to take the rotating tram across the spectacular cliffs of Chino Canyon. The magnificent view of the snow-capped mountains and the arid expanse of land in all directions took Violet’s breath away. The sky was blue as blue could be with few patches of cloud. The cute mid-century modern homes of the town were merely specks. When they exited the tram, they inhaled deeply. The air was dry but felt invigorating and devoid of any impurity.

After lunch at a cute hole-in-the-wall café, Dylan drove them to Sky’s The Limits Observatory and Nature Center in the city of Twentynine Palms for even more scenic desert views. The dome-shaped building truly revealed the splendor of California: all the colors of gold, rust, sienna—and sky, so much sky. They had arrived at the perfect moment, right as the curtain of the afternoon sky

gave way to a sultry dusk. The landscape was aglow with the thermal orange of the receding sunlight, and stars were just beginning to poke through.

They could see the sheer density of the sky—the swirls of cloud, the cream swirls in the great beyond, the illumination of thousands and thousands of stars, like sequins in a midnight blue dress.

They headed back to Palm Springs. Violet felt a sense of wonder and being part of something bigger than themselves. The ethereal beauty of Palm Springs felt like another world, perhaps the nexus of this one and the next.

Dylan had made a reservation at a fancy restaurant. Getting all dressed up, they felt very adult as they feasted on their dinner of salmon and risotto and watched the ball drop live in New York City on the big screen; three hours ahead of California.

“Life goal: Go to New York City for New Year’s,” claimed Dylan.

Violet smirked and pointed her fork at him. “I’d think you’d hate all the people there, pushing and shoving and getting up in your space.”

“I don’t know, New Year’s just feels different. Like you have to be surrounded by people. Makes it more exciting. But tonight, I want it to be just us. *Me and you.*”

Violet’s heart thrilled. No matter how long they’d been together—way longer than any of the other couples among their college friends—she never got inured to the fact that Dylan loved her. It still felt like an incredible dream that she might wake up from at any time.

After dinner, they strolled down the street, listening to the cheer of the Holidays music and absorbing energy from the Christmas lights over the local storefronts. The world was alight with merriment. As the night progressed, oddly, they found themselves more energetic. The temperature was crisp, but not uncomfortably cold.

Before long, a loud speaker announced the countdown. “10, 9, 8...” The crowd cheered with increasing intensity, as they get closer to the big moment. Finally, “3, 2, 1!”

Cheers rang. People exclaimed.

“Happy New Year, Cheetos!”

Fireworks exploded above them as the clock struck midnight. Dylan grabbed the back of Violet’s head as they shared a passionate kiss. Then he gently pulled away, staring into her eyes intently.

“Violet...marry me. Let’s get married after graduation.”

He didn’t drop to his knees. He held her close and kissed her all over, repeating his request like a mantra.

Violet’s mouth dropped. He leaned into her and repeated himself in her ear. “Marry me.” His lips tickled her ear. He bent further down and playfully nipped at the lovelock necklace around her throat. The gravity of his request hit her. Her insides melted; she fell into Dylan’s arms and wrapped her arms around him for support.

“Are you serious?” she asked, gobsmacked.

“As a heart attack.”

Violet buried her head in his chest. She couldn’t believe it, but dear God her heart felt like it would explode from love.

“Say you will,” he pressed, kissing her neck.

She tried to ignore the sudden anxiety tightening her chest, the familiar sensation of impending doom. Why did she always do this? Why couldn’t she just be happy for *once* without feeling like the world was going to come tumbling down?

She looked into Dylan’s face, full of hope and anticipation. He was everything she ever dreamed of, and he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her! Of course, there was only one answer.

“Yes,” she said. “Yes, yes, yes!”

Later in their hotel room, they made their own fireworks as the New Year's celebration continued out on the streets.

Every molecule around them seemed abuzz with excitement. Now that Violet knew where her life was headed, she wanted the rest of her life to begin as soon as possible—yet, she also wanted to live in the present. The room, that moment, was nothing short of perfection. Sure, it had only the most basic accommodations, and it was a little warm. Dylan's brown hair stuck to his glistening forehead. Still, it was paradise. They held each other and tossed around the possibilities, and their hopes and dreams.

Dylan's future had shape and substance.

"After the wedding we'll move to Los Angeles, so you can become a big-time actress," he said eagerly, knowing of her dream to be a film star.

"It's a long shot," she murmured. "LA's filled with hopefuls."

"They'd have to be blind not to put you on the big screen. You're not just beautiful; you've got star power. When you walk on stage, no one has eyes for anyone else."

"Says her boyfriend who isn't at *all* biased," she teased. Still, she couldn't help but be touched by his wholehearted confidence.

"What about you?" she asked. "What do *you* want?"

"I want a big family," Dylan announced, his arm wrapped around Violet's shoulders as she leaned on his chest, her blonde hair fanned over his pectorals. She listened to his heart as it still thumped rapidly. "I was always jealous of my friends who had siblings."

"Me, too. I always saw myself having four kids."

They tossed around ideas of their ideal future. It materialized before them already, low-hanging fruit for the taking. They lovingly murmured to each other as Violet's eyelids became heavy—it was way past midnight—but she didn't want to sleep. She couldn't recall a more euphoric

moment. Dylan began running his fingers through her hair.
It proved hypnotic. She fell into a deep slumber.

[Other Books by](#)

Eichin Chang-Lim's

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New Adult Romance

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A Memoir / Self Help book by Dr. Eichin Chang-Lim.

"Don't Expect Him to Call You Mommy or Daddy..."

Only one year after little Teddy was born, Eichin's world was turned upside down. Oh, she'd *suspected* something wasn't right. A mother *knows*.

She just hadn't expected to hear words like 'profoundly deaf' and 'genetic disorder,' as Teddy was born perfect in every way. Ten fingers, ten toes. Over eight pounds, with the most beautiful sky-blue eyes.

And yet, an audiologist had delivered the news, *telling Eichin all the things her son would never be able to do*.

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