

A romantic book cover illustration. A young man and woman are sitting on a rocky beach, looking at each other. The background features a large, glowing moon over a body of water, with mountains in the distance under a starry night sky. The title 'VIOLA BENNET' is written in large, white, serif font at the top. The author's name 'ELAINE VAUGHN' is written in a smaller, white, serif font at the bottom.

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Published by: Lean International
Office Address: Elsasser Str. 27, 28211 Bremen, Germany
Contact: info@leanintl.de, website www.violabennet.com

Print Edition: ISBN 978-3-949997-69-3
E-book Edition: ISBN 978-3-949997-70-9

Cover Design: Lean International
Interior Layout: Lean International

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This is a work of fiction.
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VIOLA BENNET

For the Creatures on Earth.

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1. ECHOES IN UNIVERSE

In the sleek, glass-walled studio of an international news network, the anchor's deep, steady voice carried a quiet tension.

“Breaking news from the M-DSAND Mars mission. The autonomous rover Nexus has transmitted data pointing to something extraordinary. The data suggest both potential biosignatures and carvings that resemble signs of an ancient civilization on Martian surface rocks.”

A pause. A shift of tone.

“Operating entirely under its self-guided decision system, the rover was exploring a sector near Jezero Crater when it detected formations unlike anything

we've seen before. Among the images it sent back are geometric carvings etched into iron-rich rock, deliberate, patterned, far too complex to be natural. Scientists are calling it a 'high-priority anomaly.' M-DSAND confirms this is the strongest evidence yet of ancient intelligence on Mars."

The broadcast cut to live footage from Mars. Red dust shimmered under thin light. The camera closed in on the lines, sharp, symmetrical, deliberate.

"To discuss the implications of these findings, we're joined live by Mr. Elias Meyer, lead systems researcher at M-DSAND Autonomous Decision Lab."

"Hello, Mr. Meyer."

"Hello, Mr. Smith."

"..."

Meanwhile, in St. Gallen, Switzerland, Viola sat at her sunlit desk, reviewing a financial report for an upcoming MBA presentation, the daily news streaming quietly from her laptop. She had been half-listening to the live broadcast playing softly from her laptop.

Her gaze stayed fixed on the dense figures and tangled cash-flow projections before her. The air was

dry, tinged with bitter coffee and the scent of crisp paper.

The report's words, "something extraordinary," "possible biosignature", floated past her unnoticed. But when the anchor mentioned "high-priority anomalies" and "ancient intelligence on Mars," a faint spark of her old curiosity, the one once stirred by the mysterious rocks of Olduvai Gorge, made her pen pause for a heartbeat.

Then, as the anchor, Mr. Smith, shifted to his calm, measured tone to introduce the next segment, Viola's subconscious caught on to a rhythm of syllables that struck her with sudden familiarity.

She distinctly heard the words:

"... To discuss the implications of these findings, we're joined live by Mr. Elias Meyer..."

Elias Meyer?

Viola froze. Her steel pen slipped from her fingers and clattered onto the polished desk, the sound deafening in the quiet room. Her heart thudded against her ribs.

Her head turned sharply toward the screen. The

studio lights framed him, poised, composed, intellectually luminous, as he spoke with the same steady clarity she remembered. His voice, deep and magnetic, filled the room:

“Yes, the rover is equipped with our advanced autonomous detecting system. It was this system that guided the vehicle beyond its preset trajectory to these specific sites. Whether these markings suggest an early biosignature or a form of communication that could redefine humanity’s understanding of life’s origins, we are now working closely with planetary scientists and linguists around the world.”

His words were measured, precise, carrying the gravity of the discovery. This young man who now held the world’s attention was Elias Meyer, the man she had known for more than ten years.

It stirred a cascade of memories in the last eight years, her childhood, the dancing school debutante ball, the sailing camp ripples, the graduation prom, the birthday parties of Lisa, and most hauntingly, the healing days and nights in Switzerland.

He stood now at the forefront of science, a figure of

global acclaim. Yet to her, in the sunlight of her small apartment, he remained the same quiet, intelligent, and yes, still irresistibly handsome gentleman she had always known.

The broadcast returned to Mars again. Symbols lingered on the screen. It looks fragile, yet eternal. Viola closed her eyes, and at once she was transported elsewhere:

The scent of dry, heated dust, the coarse feel of sand beneath her worn boots. She saw the ancient rock she had once touched in the Olduvai Gorge, the faint, primal scratching of early humanity. At that moment, a powerful intuition stirred within her.

Now, on Mars, that same haunting image reappeared, not identical in form, but identical in intent: that powerful, inherent impulse had been transcending time, species, and worlds, to leave something behind.

Viola opened her eyes, gazing at Elias's composed profile on the screen.

She felt an ancient, invisible force drawing them together. This force was the hidden structure of a Bach

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composition that, after every wandering detour, always resolves to its original harmony.

Is this our destiny? she wondered.

Mars was speaking to Earth.

What was the past whispering to her heart?

2. BETWEEN TWO SHORES

“Yes! Oh my God, we did it!”

As the broadcast cut away, Elias was instantly enveloped by his team. A whirlwind of ecstatic cheers and a rapid-fire succession of high-fives and firm handshakes broke out around him. The collective relief and triumph in the room was electric.

The confirmed discovery of the non-natural markings marked a major milestone for their Mars project. Their Mars Detection System for Autonomous Navigation and Decision-making (M-DSAND) had

been key, guiding the rover through the “Seven Minutes of Terror” landing and enabling it to identify and retrieve vital geological samples.

Applause and whoops erupted, champagne corks popped, the fizz spraying up in a victorious mist. The entire institute atrium was alighted with infectious, celebratory energy.

Across the jubilant crowd, Nicole’s gaze found him. Beneath his tousled light brown curls, his sea-blue eyes held a quiet intensity. He was, without question, the most attractive scientist she had ever worked with.

She smiled, raising her flute, and gracefully navigated the throng to reach Elias. The crisp clink of their glasses cut through the surrounding noise.

“Congratulations, Elias! You look exhausted,” Nicole said, her eyes a mix of professional pride and personal concern.

“Thanks, Nicole. Yeah, we haven’t had much time to rest lately,” Elias replied, meeting her gaze with a calm, gentle smile.

“Hey, genius!” David called out as he joined them. “A milestone worth every sleepless night, huh? Any

plans for the Easter holiday?”

“Hey, David,” Nicole quipped, “we still have another critical retrieval test until next week.”

“Yeah, yeah, but we should plan something afterwards, right? How about a private getaway with me?”

“Absolutely not.” Nicole rolled her eyes, smiling.

“What about Santa Catalina Island?” Elias said with a grin. “André invited all of us, everyone from the lab, to his villa for a spring holiday party.”

“So cool, Elias!” David cheered, joined by the others.

“Guys, our big boss, André’s hosting a spring bash in the coming holiday at his place on Santa Catalina Island,” someone announced. “We’re all invited!”

“Awesome! That’s got to be one of the most stunning beaches in California.”

“I need this break. Project stress has been insane. I can’t wait to get some time on my new SUP, just drifting in Descanso Bay. Woo!”

Amid the excited chatter, Elias clapped his hands. “Alright, team, listen up! One final test this week. We

need to ensure those Martian samples are retrieved flawlessly. Stay sharp, and then we'll have truly earned that Descanso Beach sunshine!"

"Woohoo!"

After the hectic, exhausting pace of the lab, the long-awaited day finally arrived.

André's villa was nestled in a secluded cove on Santa Catalina Island, an hour's ferry ride from Long Beach.

As the boat docked, the ocean glittered like shattered gold under the bright sun. The air was thick with salt and the heady warmth of a spring day that felt like early summer.

André, Elias' uncle, a man of effortless warmth, waited by the entrance. Since his wife Grace had passed, his annual spring party during easter holiday had become a personal tradition, a kind of yearly tribute, an unstated invitation. He liked to imagine that Grace accepted from heaven, joining them once more in their beloved holiday home.

The villa was expansive. White walls gleamed in the

sunlight, softened by climbing flowering vines. A massive pool dominated the garden. It was perfect for the upcoming pool party.

Manicured, towering junipers framed the property, forming a quiet, verdant halo around the scenic Descanso Bay.

The team quickly dropped their bags and changed, slipping into the rhythm of sunbathing, swimming, and beach sports.

The highlight of the holiday would be the night parties and fireworks, with André inviting a mix of old friends and Elias's younger team.

"Great job, Elias," André said, placed a firm hand on his nephew's shoulder. "This Mars mission, your autonomous navigation system, has taken us to new heights. Hard to believe how far we've come. I'm so proud of you."

"Thanks, André. Your faith in this project means everything to me. It drives me, both exhausting and exhilarating," Elias replied, a rare spark of intensity lighting his eyes.

"Passionate as ever, right? And how are your

parents? Still chasing those ancient symbols and scripts around the world? I sometimes wish they'd slow down a little, take a break, and spend some time with us."

"Yeah, they're doing what they love, and in our Mars project, they've been invaluable," Elias said softly. "I used to wish they'd stay with me instead of chasing the next ancient find. But now... I understand. It's a calling, they're answering the summons of work that owns their hearts."

André clapped his shoulder again. "You've grown up, boy."

Elias hugged his uncle. "You haven't aged a day! Still my closest friend." They bumped palms, then locked hands in a firm handshake, laughing together.

Friday night's party was extraordinary. André had spared no expense. Elias and David had taken the boat into town for last-minute supplies and returned to the garden, already pulsing with energy. Old Joe, the DJ, was spinning infectious beats, and people were already dancing. Spotting Elias and David, the crowd swept them into the midst of food, flowing wine, and lively conversation.

The sun sank, and a massive bonfire ignited on the beach. Slightly tipsy, the crowd gathered around the roaring flames, eyes on the grand fireworks planned for later.

“Truth or Dare!” someone shouted.

“Yeah! Let’s do it!”

“Here’s how it works: toss a stone into this cup. Make it, you pick someone for Truth or Dare. Miss, you do it yourself. Got it?”

“Okay, cool!”

The game erupted in laughter. Dares involved excessive drinking and ridiculous feats; truths, fueled by the alcohol, led to unexpected confessions.

After several noisy rounds, the atmosphere was thick with warmth and recklessness.

“Whoa, Nicole! Your first clean toss! Who do you pick?”

Nicole rose, arms wide, eyes crinkling in a dazzling smile. She shouted over the din: “Elias!”

“Yeah! Elias! Elias! Truth or Dare?” the crowd roared.

“I choose... Dare!” Elias responded with a calm

smile.

“Ooh, okay, okay! This round’s Dare is: Kiss the person immediately to your right!” Adam declared.

The crowd went ballistic.

“Nicole! Nicole! Nicole!” they chanted. Since Nicole was seated directly to Elias’s right, everyone knew this was the dramatic, funny moment they had been waiting for.

Nicole froze for a brief, breathless second, a nervous flush creeping up her neck. She had a brief glance at David, embarrassed. Then, before she could utter a word, Elias reached out and gently took her hand.

He bowed, pressing his lips lightly to the back of her hand. The gesture seemed more performance than intimacy. It was elegant, courteous, and carefully restrained.

“Oh, no!” the crowd groaned in disappointment. “That’s, like, a medieval ritual! Not a proper dare!”

Nicole, though a tiny heat had surged through her, quickly regained her composure. She pushed her hands down in a calming gesture. “Hold on, guys, we never said where the kiss had to land, did we? Dare,

accomplished!” She had saved both Elias and herself from real awkwardness.

“It is, guys.” Elias laughed.

As the applause, boos, and laughter died down, Elias settled back beside her. David wrapped Elias’ shoulder, bursted a releasing smile. Only Elias knew about David and Nicole. And only David knew about the feelings Nicole once had for Elias.

Just then, a dazzling firework shot into the sky, exploding in a shower of brilliant color.

“The fireworks!” Everyone surged toward the shore, eager to watch the display light up the Pacific waves.

The bonfire’s embers glowed, the sea breeze carrying faint traces of alcohol and laughter. Elias slipped away from the crowd, phone in hand, heading toward a quieter stretch of sand. The fireworks exploded overhead, casting light on his profile and on the corner of his heart that had never truly dimmed.

He stared at his phone screen, his heart rate inexplicably quickened. Amid all the celebration and clamor, a sudden, acute loneliness struck him, the person he most wanted to share this moment with was

miles away.

Viola.

The name rolled softly in his mind. The image of her smiling by the lakeside eight years ago was as vivid as the firework trails now streaking across the sky. Eight years, and the invisible cord between them still held fast. He regretted leaving Switzerland so abruptly, giving her space, a decision that had only brought him silent, self-inflicted agony. He had rehearsed this moment of reaching out countless times.

His fingers hovered, deleting and rewriting each word, each a risk. Finally, he attached a photo of the exploding fireworks and sent a message that felt honest, measured:

“Happy Birthday, Viola.

I miss you.

Yours, Elias.”

He held his breath as he pressed Send. The fireworks reflected in his eyes, a dazzling, vibrant promise of the unknown future he was now daring to claim.

Miles away in Madrid, Viola, absorbed in preparations for the upcoming gallery show, was startled, then unexpectedly lifted, by Elias's message. Her mind was a torrent of untold stories: the difficult time after breakup with Javier, the unsettling suffering betrayal by her closest friend, Lisa, and the complicated reason she'd come back to her ex-boyfriend's city. And, what a disastrous and unbelievable week! Though a thousand words pressed at her fingertips, none felt right, and in the end, all she sent were a few simple lines:

“Amazing Fireworks!

Thank you!

I miss you too.

Viola.”

The words, the fireworks, the sea, all of it pulled Elias and Viola back eight years, to the *Unisee* (*University Lake*) after the *Abtanzball* (*dancing school prom*). He had been her date, and together they'd danced recklessly by the lakeside as fireworks erupted

overhead. Under the starry sky and the light of the explosions, Viola's image had been irrevocably imprinted on his heart. All these years, she had remained right there.

"I'm sorry if I embarrassed you earlier," came Nicole's voice, sudden and close beside him.

"No, you didn't. Nicole, I'm the one who should say thank you." Elias snapped out of his reverie, looking at her with genuine regret.

Nicole cut him off, slightly embarrassed. "No, Elias, don't. We're friends, right?"

"Right. Friends." A visible line of tension eased from Elias's face, though his gaze drifted immediately back to his phone.

Seeing his sincerity, Nicole felt a tiny pang of disappointment, quickly overridden by warmth. *Being his friend is quite enough, I have my David now.* She thought. Especially when she saw the sweet, undeniably lovesick expression on his face as he'd typed his message.

"Your girlfriend, then?" Nicole gestured toward the phone.

“Ah... not exactly. Not yet,” Elias said, a trace of shyness flickering through his tone.

“But you must care for her a lot,” Nicole stated, certainty in her voice.

“Honestly? Yes,” Elias paused, letting his gaze drift far out over the ocean. “Always have.”

At that exact moment, his phone rang sharply.

“What? What happened? Are you okay? Is she...? I’ll call her. Take care, Lisa.”

It was Lisa, Elias’s cousin. She quickly relayed the terrible news: Javier’s plane crashed, and the fact that both Lisa and Viola were currently together in Madrid dealing with the immediate aftermath. Elias went rigid with dread. He ended the call and immediately dialed Viola.

“Please answer my phone, please.”

The call went unanswered.

His worry surged like the tide, eclipsing the fading fireworks over the dark sea. Longing for her crashed through him in relentless waves, unstoppable and consuming.

3. THE GARDEN DUET

Eight years earlier, in Bremen Germany, the hometown of Viola and Elias.

The setting sun cast a warm, honeyed glow through the lace curtains, illuminating Viola's soft, youthful features. Her golden-brown hair was partly swept up, leaving long, soft curls to frame her shoulders. Fifteen years old, she turned sideways in front of the full-length mirror, admiring her gown, a lustrous deep lilac silk, embroidered with fine silver threads that seemed to catch the light like scattered stardust. She smoothed the delicate tulle over her shoulder; a nervous tension mixed with exhilarating anticipation fluttering in her chest.

“Do you think this looks okay?” she asked Lisa,

who was sitting on a velvet bench.

Lisa was already dressed, meticulously adjusting a pearl-encrusted hairpin. She looked up and her eyes widened. “Whoa, you look absolutely stunning. Is that Elsa standing here?”

Viola laughed, playfully swatting Lisa’s arm. “Oh, please. Lisa, I need Elsa’s power to freeze the whole room so I don’t get nervous and make a complete fool of myself.”

She turned to look at her beautifully dressed friend. “But look at you, my queen! Malik will probably bow the moment he sees you.”

“Ha! Then I want to hear exactly how he plans to confess his undying devotion.”

“Don’t you dare tell me what that smooth-talker says.”

“Hey, Viola, I guarantee it’ll make your entire day! Ha!”

The girls laughed, their eyes gleaming with a sparkle of adolescent excitement.

Tonight was their first formal debutante ball, the *Abtanzball*. After months of dance and etiquette

classes, this event marked their transition into formal social life, the most thrilling moment of their blossoming youth.

“Lisa, what color handkerchief did you get for Malik?”

“Light blue. He said he will be wearing a dark blue suit with a bright blue tie. What about yours?”

“Ooh, cool! I got a burgundy one. I can’t believe I guessed Elias would wear a burgundy bow tie.”

“A terrifying level of psychic connection,” Lisa mused, suddenly thoughtful. “Viola, my cousin has always had a thing for you. He brings you up at every family gathering. Are you guys dating?”

“Oh, no!” Viola denied instinctively, then added, slightly flustered, “But, well, yes, if walking in the park and debating music counts as a date.”

“Nothing more advanced than that?” Lisa teased, her smile turning mischievously wicked.

“Li-sa!” Viola drew out her friend’s name in mock exasperation, but inside, her pulse had quickened.

They exchanged a knowing look and burst into shared laughter. Lisa was her closest friend, and

between them, there were no secrets.

Viola gently tucked a stray curl behind her ear, her mind conjuring the image of her escort, Elias, Lisa's cousin and a year older, had first met Viola at Lisa's birthday party years ago, and they had crossed paths each year since, later meeting again in dance class. Elias was usually quiet, always carrying a gentle, reserved smile. He was growing into his sharp, defined features; his clean, slightly wavy, light-brown hair fell neatly across his forehead, complementing his clear, sea-blue eyes.

"Do you actually like dancing?" Viola had once asked him curiously during a break.

"Absolutely not," Elias had replied, shaking his head with a slight, wry smile. "I don't think any guy genuinely enjoys it. Hunting for remnants of old-fashioned rules in a modern generation just feels odd, doesn't it?"

His smile was shy, yet his eyes held a sincerity and thoughtfulness beyond his years.

"But so many guys are here, Malik, Arnold, they're all your friends, right? Why are you all taking

the class then?” Viola asked, her eyes wide with genuine curiosity.

“You’d have to ask our parents,” he sighed with mock despair. “Can you imagine? Generation X parents, who grew up on punk rock, suddenly decide their kids need traditional ballroom etiquette?”

“Ha! But you’re actually talented. The rhythm, the posture... It’s all perfect. I think I’m one of the few girls whose feet haven’t been crushed yet. So, thank you!”

Viola laughed, slightly breathless.

Elias raised an eyebrow. “That’s because you’re the one who knows how I move.”

Viola felt her cheeks warm. “Well... maybe. We’ve known each other for so long.”

“Well,” he continued, ticking off his fingers, “last Saturday I saw you at my tournament, pretending you were there for Lisa but clapping way too loudly when I scored.”

“I did not clap too loudly!”

“You did,” Elias said, smiling.

“And I saw you at my violin concert at the music

school. You were clapping loudly too,” Viola shot back.

“Lisa dragged me to your recital,” he said with a playful grin. “And clapping is basic politeness in that situation, isn’t it?”

Viola rolled her eyes and her smile faltered.

Noticing it, Elias quickly softened his voice. “Hey, no! No doubt, it was a fantastic performance. I couldn’t help applauding. I love it for sure.” He gave a small, sincere smile, “And... Don’t you think we run into each other everywhere? Feels like fate.”

She snorted. “Is that even a thing?”

“It is now.”

He hesitated, glancing at her. “Speaking of... whatever fate this is, are you busy this Saturday?”

Viola blinked. “Saturday?”

“Yeah.” He tried to sound casual but didn’t quite manage it. “There’s a new café in Rhododendron Park. Lisa said you’d like it, but she’s ditching me for a study group, so... I figured I’d ask you instead. And after that, maybe we could go to my place and play some music together. Like the duet of piano and

violin. Bach or Vivaldi or something. I remember you mentioned it..." The more he spoke, the more nervous he sounded.

"Oh?" Viola tilted her head. "So, I'm your backup plan?"

"No, no! More like... my original plan that I'm pretending wasn't."

She laughed. "You're terrible at this."

"Is that a yes?"

She pretended to think, then smiled. "Yeah. Saturday sounds good."

Elias exhaled too visibly. "Great. Then it's a date."

Viola raised an eyebrow. "Is it?"

He met her eyes. "Only if you want it to be."

Her smile didn't waver. "We'll see."

That Saturday, they met first at the rhododendron park near his house. There was a small playground, and they ran over to it, laughing.

"I used to come here all the time when I was little. It was my paradise. I used to do the zipline like this," Elias said, performing a few ridiculously tricky moves.

“Oh, I bet! I think I definitely saw that ridiculous display when I was a kid!” Viola laughed, watching his playful antics.

“Then it’s settled: we must have run into each other here when we were little,” Elias said, giving her a quick, knowing look before feigning seriousness.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m sure you truly caught my attention, but you probably didn’t notice me,” Viola replied, blushing slightly.

“The little Elias must have been quite the idiot,” he grinned.

They both laughed then walked into the café.

With some drinks and cakes, they chatted and smiled, the kind of unhurried talk that made the afternoon feel gentler than usual. At some point, their conversation drifted naturally back to music phrasing, interpretations, pieces they wanted to try.

It felt only natural to keep going, so they walked to Elias’s house. The spacious living room held a glossy black grand piano by a wide picture window overlooking a quiet garden. Elias carefully set up an extra music stand for Viola. She took out her

treasured violin, adjusted the sheet music, and soon they began to play together.

The afternoon sun streamed through the windows, bathing the room in golden light as the melody seemed to dance between them, lifting their hands in gentle unison. The two teenagers were lost in the music. She drew the bow across the strings while he gently pressed the keys. The delicate rhythm flowed between them, their hearts subtly attuned to the music's gentle sway. In the moments their eyes met, a beautiful, innocent chemistry sparked between them.

Elias then pulled out a piece of handwritten sheet music. "I want you to hear something special," he said, his eyes glinting with anticipation.

"I'd love to." She smiled.

He played the piano and sang softly.

(The Song)

The evening breeze drifts soft and low,

A boy leans close, "Shall we dance slow?"

A single rose held in his hand,

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Our hearts entwined, like waves on sand.

If this moment could stay, never fade,

Would you run with me, unafraid?

Before the song drifts into night,

Let me dream here in your light.

Each note we play, a whispered vow,

The night holds its breath, the stars lean close,

We sway together, a secret only we know,

Each note we play becomes the steps we follow.

So, hold my hand, let time be still,

Let music guide us where hearts will.

In every chord, your smile I trace,

Forever held in soft embrace.

As Elias softly sang the final line, his gaze locked with Viola's. A spark of something magical passed between them, a nervous flutter unlike anything Viola had felt before.

Viola's cheeks warmed as a soft blush spread

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across her face. “Oh... that’s so touching. Did you write it for someone special?”

“Yes,” Elias answered, his voice soft yet firm.

“Oh.” Viola didn’t dare press further. She feared the answer, yet desperately hoped for it.

Elias hesitated, unable to voice the words he longed to say.

In truth, the song was his, written for Viola alone.

4. THE DANCE OF FIRST LIGHTS

“Hey, Viola! We’re leaving now!” Lisa called, her voice bright with excitement.

Viola blinked, shaking herself from her thoughts. Everything was in place, her dress, her hair, her carefully chosen shoes, yet her heart still fluttered with that uneasy mixture of excitement and nerves. *Breathe*, she told herself silently. *Smile and just enjoy, no one will notice your missed steps.*

The grand ballroom of the Atlantic Hotel glowed with opulence. Crystal chandeliers scattered light like a thousand tiny stars, while polished marble floors reflected the shimmer of gowns and tuxedos. A soft

murmur of laughter and rustling fabric filled the air.

Near the entrance, Elias stood waiting, a bouquet of roses cradled carefully in his hands.

“Elias!” Viola spotted him instantly in the crowd, her heart leaping as if it had been waiting for this moment.

“Hi, Viola,” Elias said, his voice a little breathless. “You look... absolutely stunning tonight.”

He held out the bouquet, his cheeks coloring slightly. “I hope you like them.” It was a beautifully curated posy of roses, soft lavender interwoven with pale pink, their colors echoing the intricate silver thread in her dress.

“Oh, they’re exquisite!” Viola lifted the roses to her face, breathing in the delicate fragrance. “The roses smell divine, and the colors... they match my dress perfectly, don’t they?”

“You are always perfect!” Elias’s grin widened, a hint of playful twinkle in his eyes. “And I consulted with a little bird named Lisa.”

With a knowing smile, Viola reached into her clutch and handed him a folded burgundy silk

handkerchief. “This is for you.”

Elias unfolded it with awkward fingers and laughed. “It even matches my bow tie. You think of everything.” He tucked it into his suit pocket, fumbling just a bit, and they both laughed.

Just then, the orchestra struck the first notes of the Emperor Waltz. The head of their dance school, Professor Hofmann, stepped forward to lead the procession. Dozens of boys and girls, dressed in their very first evening attire, formed into pairs. Their steps were formal, measured, yet beneath the polished surface, every glance and every shy smile betrayed the truth: adolescence was giving way to adulthood, and the effort of it all was both thrilling and exhilarating.

Elias offered his arm. Viola placed her hand lightly in his, feeling her breath catch at the contact. *Don't trip. Don't mess this up. Just follow the music.* She told herself.

As they glided into the waltz, Elias gently watched her. *If the stars could dance, he thought, they would move exactly like Viola, shimmering, untouchable,*

yet close enough to make me forget to breathe.

Viola, feeling his gaze, tried to suppress a smile. Memories flickered: afternoons spent practicing steps together, their laughter echoing down quiet park, the glow of sunlight on Elias's face as he played the piano. *Please, let this night last forever*, she thought. *Don't let the lights dim just yet.*

Song after song followed, the formal Viennese Waltz giving way to the measured glide of the Foxtrot, and then to the playful, hesitant steps of the Cha-Cha. Couples spun across the ballroom, their movements a mix of smooth, elegant precision and tentative, excited uncertainty. Boys struggled to remember the sequence of the Quickstep; girls giggled as toes were inevitably stepped upon during the sweeping turns of the Tango. Each beat was a challenge, and every completed rotation felt like a small, exciting victory.

Not every song called for dancing. At times, Viola and Elias sat at the edge of the hall with friends, sipping fizzy mocktails in tall glasses. Elias loosened his bowtie. "I feel like I'm wearing a costume," he

whispered to Viola, clinking his glass against hers with mock solemnity. “I keep waiting for someone to shout, ‘Gotcha! Go put your jeans back on!’”

“Lol!” Viola laughed, glancing toward Elias. “I feel the same, but two more hours to wait. Not so bad.”

Lisa leaned closer to Viola, lowering her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “Malik just told me I look like I just stepped out of a poster. And every second he doesn’t kiss me is a second wasted on this planet.”

Viola instantly grimaced, but laughter bubbled up as she playfully pushed Lisa away. “Ugh, don’t! You promised not to tell me what he said! This is absolutely gross! I’m getting actual goosebumps.” Viola turned to look at Elias. They shrugged in unison, exchanged a knowing glance, and couldn’t help smiling.

“Did you guys see Charlotte slip out?” Daver whispered, leaning closer. “She looked green on her way to the ladies’ room. Guess someone’s brother’s ID worked a little too well at the bar.”

Viola shook her head, suppressing a smile. “Poor

Charlotte. She's usually so proper."

"Proper girls always have the most interesting breakdowns," Lisa muttered dryly, then nudged Daver. "Speaking of proper, Anna just finished dancing with your rival, Marcus. Word is they're now an item, your reign is over, Daver."

Daver scoffed. "Please. Anna's way too serious for Marcus. She's just using him to make someone else jealous."

"Or maybe," Lisa chimed in, "she's just thrilled not to be stuck dancing with her back-up." She gave Malik a playful nudge; he pretended to pout.

The laughter, the playful teasing, the easy closeness, it all felt like a new doorway opening into the adult world.

At ten o'clock sharp, the orchestra gave way to a DJ. Classical elegance gave way to pulsing bass, flashing lights, and wild cheers. The ballroom erupted into a swirl of disco energy.

Lisa grabbed Malik's hand and disappeared into the crowd. Viola laughed as she watched her friend's hair fly loose to the beat. So, this is what first love

feels like, she thought, though a small knot of doubt tugged at her chest.

“Do you think Malik is serious about Lisa?” she asked, leaning toward Elias so he could hear her over the music.

Elias gave a helpless shrug, his lips curving in a half-smile. “Who knows? I warned her. Malik’s promises are like fruits on trees, plenty of them. But Lisa never listens when her heart is set.”

Viola frowned, a flicker of worry crossing her mind. But before the mood could settle, Elias caught her gaze and jerked his head toward the dance floor. He didn’t need to speak, the spark in his eyes was enough of an invitation.

The two of them joined the throng. The lights strobed faster, the music swelled, and Elias spun sharply, crisp, confident movements, his body flowing perfectly with the beat. Viola stood breathless, watching him. She had never seen him like this: so alive, radiant, and sure of himself. The sight made her pulse race in time with the music.

Then he reached for her hand, a daring, teasing

smile lighting his face. Viola let herself be pulled into his rhythm. They moved together, caught in the dizzying rise of the music, spinning, leaping, laughing, their eyes never breaking away from each other. For a while, there was no crowd, no time, just their steps, their breath, and the wild symphony of youth.

Suddenly, Lisa appeared, her cheeks flushed, Malik at her side. “There’s a fireworks show at Unisee tonight! They said the beach at the lakeshore has the best view. Want to come?”

Viola and Elias exchanged a glance, then nodded in unison.

Outside, the air was cool and crisp, carrying the scent of damp earth and early-blooming flowers, a stark, beautiful contrast to the heat and noise they had just escaped. As if the world had taken a deep breath after all that glitter. The night wrapped around them like a velvet cloak, soft and infinite. The lake, dark and still, mirrored the faint starlight and the gentle glow of the moon. They stopped abruptly, catching their breath, their laughter fading into the quiet,

romantic hush of the lake.

"Wow. The silence." Viola whispered.

"Seriously amazing. We can finally breathe out here." Elias said, visibly relaxed.

"The lake at night is so much more beautiful. It's so romantic, isn't it?" Lisa said softly.

"I could stay here all night," Malik murmured. "It's so peaceful."

Slowly, the tender music named "*I See the Light*" drifted across the water beneath the velvet sky as someone placed a small speaker on the ground. The melody seemed to melt into the night, the star light soft as a sigh.

Elias turned to Viola, his hand outstretched once more. She took it without hesitation. He held her close, her hands resting softly on his shoulders, and together they moved in a tender slow dance, the music guiding every step along the moonlit lakeshore. Memories of the night danced through her mind, the glittering chandeliers, the dizzy whirl of the waltz, the heartbeat of the disco floor. The nearness of Elias, the warmth of his touch, made everything

shimmer with perfect, unforgettable moments of the night.

By the lake, Lisa and Malik were kissing softly. Viola watched from a distance, and the sight of their small happiness brought a flush to her cheeks.

At this very moment, the fireworks began. Explosions of color shattered the quiet sky, reflected in the rippling water below. Elias guided her gently to the sandy shore, slipping his arm around her shoulders. She leaned against him, the crackle of fireworks above them blending with the rhythm of her own heartbeats.

The night froze in brilliance, two young lives illuminated, their laughter and unspoken feelings painted across the canvas of the sky.

Maybe life really is one endless dance, Viola thought, her heart fluttering with the idea. Some partners drift away after a single song, but some... some remain through every melody. And the luckiest of all is finding not just a perfect partner for the dance, but someone whose rhythm matches yours, even when the music stops.

5. WAVES OF SUMMER

Elias's team on Santa Catalina Island had never had a vacation quite like this since the lab launched its Mars-Detection Project. It was a rare, relaxed, and joyful break from their demanding work.

To avoid burdening André, the team split tasks: a few cleaned the villa, some went into town for supplies, and others stayed behind to cook. Elias and David took the small boat into town to fetch groceries and daily necessities, enjoying the sun and sea breeze along the way.

David, now Elias's assistant and closest partner at the institute, had actually known him for years, but their friendship had truly solidified later during their

reunion at university.

“Last night... We drank too much. I barely remember how I got back to the room. But it was amazing... felt so good!” David said, staring at the beach from the boat.

“Yeah, wonderful night,” Elias replied.

“Nicole used to have feelings for you, you know?” David asked casually, smirking as if it were no big deal.

“Oh it must be your imagination! trust your girl, David.” Elias said with a shrug.

Elias didn't notice David's sigh. “You know, Elias, I often wonder why every girl I like always falls for you first.”

“Every?” Elias raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah... well, twice, to be exact. The last time was in the Netherlands, remember?”

“Oh my god... the time you almost decked me?” Elias chuckled, but quickly sobered. He still remembered those moments. The memory lingered sweetly and painfully. If he hadn't screwed up back then, his relationship with Viola might have taken a

completely different course.

It was the summer he turned seventeen, just before leaving Germany with his family.

Alongside Lisa, Malik, Elias and Viola had spent the vacation at a sailing camp in the Netherlands. There, they learned sailing techniques, knot tying, navigation, reading the wind, steering, raising and lowering sails, and even maritime safety. Each exercise pushed both their skills and stamina to the next level.

David, a bright, energetic IT enthusiast from America, always stood out. He was quick-minded and fast-handed, immediately executing every instruction. But what unnerved Elias most was David's constant effort to be near Viola, lingering just a heartbeat too close.

During a knot-tying exercise, meant to be done independently, David sidled up to Viola with a "Let me help you" smile. "This knot is tricky. I'll show you," he said, his hands brushing hers as he guided her movements. Viola laughed nervously. "Thanks, I think I've almost got it," but she didn't fully pull away

from his touch.

Elias stood nearby, unable to stop himself from interjecting. “Viola is actually a fast learner. She doesn’t need any assistance.” His tone was casual, even lighthearted, but beneath it, Elias’s hands gripped the rope so tightly his knuckles turned white, betraying the tension he tried to hide.

Later, during a pair steering exercise, David quickly said, “Viola, you and me? Let’s pair up.” Viola hesitated a beat but agreed. Elias walked over, a sharp pang of jealousy tightening his chest as his blue eyes sought hers. Viola blinked and smiled, oblivious to his inner turmoil, leaving him with nothing but a quiet shake of his head in reluctant resignation.

The final night of the camp culminated in a huge graduation party at the beachside club. Food and drinks flowed freely, and the music and lights were dizzying. Lisa and Malik, who had officially started dating, were already deep in the throbbing dance floor, occasionally exchanging sweet, public kisses. Robin and the others were jumping with the crowd,

laughing.

Elias, however, couldn't take his eyes off Viola. When a few classmates, including David, pulled her onto the dance floor, Elias couldn't take it any longer. He moved toward her and whispered in her ear, "Want to go for a walk? It's too loud in here." Sensing the sudden dip in his mood, Viola looked at him with concern and willingly followed him out of the clamorous club.

They bypassed the crowds and walked onto the silent beach. The cool night air, carrying the deep scent of the sea, washed away the echoes of the music. After walking for a while, they sat down side-by-side on the damp sand. The sky stretched in deep velvet blue above them, the Milky Way arcing like a silver ribbon across the heavens.

"You've seemed a little off these past few days," Viola said gently, her voice full of genuine concern.

"No, not at all. Maybe just tired," Elias mumbled, staring straight ahead.

"Tired? The tennis club's golden boy, tired?" Viola challenged, a hint of playful disbelief in her

voice.

“Yeah, but I can’t explain it, even to myself.” Elias pointed to a cluster of bright stars in the northern sky. “Look up there, that band of light is the Milky Way. See those two extremely bright stars on either side?”

“Oh, yes. They’re shining, they’re flickering,” Viola whispered.

“They are called Altair and Vega. In ancient Eastern legend, Altair is a cowherd and Vega is a beautiful goddess. They fell in love and married, but the gods were furious for some reason and separated them with the vast river of the Milky Way. They stare at each other every day, yearning, hoping the other can feel their love.” Elias’ voice was a little melancholy. And Viola listened quietly.

He went on, his gaze drifting toward the horizon. “Their devotion moved a flock of magpies, who fly together once a year, to form a temporary bridge so they can meet.” Viola watched Elias as he told the story, a shadow of thought crossing his face, and somehow, that only made him more charming.

“The story says that true lovers will always find a

way to be together. People are moved because, no matter the distance, even if they only meet once a year, their love endures.”

“Wow, that’s a beautiful, romantic story,” Viola breathed, her eyes shimmering with wonder, her chest fluttering softly as she listened.

Elias looked back at her, his gaze intense. For a moment, he said nothing, the hush between them filled only by the sound of the waves.

“Viola...” The word hung in the air, unfinished.

“Mm?” Viola answered softly.

He slowly lifted his hand, gently tucking a curl behind her ear, his fingers brushing softly against her cheek. He spoke in a low voice, almost a whisper, “Love always finds a way. Doesn’t it?”

Viola nodded faintly, “yes... It does,” Viola’s voice was thoughtful, almost distant. “Life will eventually become what we love.”

Elias nodded, his gaze soft as it rested on Viola. “Yes, it will.”

The night breeze was soft; the waves gently lapped the shore. The Milky Way shimmered above them,

stars reflected in Viola's eyes, as if the heavens were pausing to watch them. Elias's hand found hers, his fingertips trembling slightly, as if afraid that letting go would mean losing something precious forever. His heated gaze lingered on her eyes, then her lips, and his low voice stirred something deep within her. Viola felt her heart pound, her cheeks burning. Drawn by an irresistible, mutual force, Elias leaned in, his lips meeting hers in a tender, soft first kiss. For that suspended moment, the entire beach vanished, leaving only the two of them.

Then, Elias stopped for a second, his brow furrowed with sudden concern. "Is it okay?" He whispered.

"Sure. It's okay," Viola gazed at him gently, her voice soft but certain, her heart racing, her cheeks warm with a sudden, exhilarating heat. Elias kissed her again. It seemed to say a thousand times 'I love you.' Though he didn't speak the words, his lips and warm embrace said it all. Starlight shimmered on the water; their heartbeats blended with the rhythm of the waves. Her fingers traced his arm lightly, a quiet

acknowledgment of the moment they were sharing.

A moment later, the atmosphere was violently broken by the sound of staggering footsteps. David and a few other students stumbled toward them, clearly drunk, bottles in hand. He burst into manic applause upon seeing the scene.

“Oh, wow, guys! Stars! Ocean! The perfect romantic movie! Should I offer my blessing?”

He wagged his finger wildly. “No! I just, simply, can’t!” He shouted very loudly.

The atmosphere instantly froze. Elias slowly stood up, his voice dangerously low. “David, you’re drunk.”

David scoffed. “I’m the drunk one, or are you two the ones whose heads have been turned? What a hypocrite!” He lunged forward, his shoulder narrowly missing Elias, who stepped back just in time. The tension snapped. Elias pointed at David, anger blazing in his eyes. “You better watch your mouth and keep your filthy words to yourself!” He instinctively shielded Viola with his body.

Suddenly, David’s fist swung out, connecting

sharply with Elias's left cheek. "Okay, let my fist tell you what you've ruined!"

Elias staggered back, a stinging pain washing over his cheek, but he clenched his jaw, refusing to back down. He countered with a punch to David's abdomen, sending him doubled over. They wrestled in the sand, fists and elbows flying, sand spraying around them.

Viola cried out, rushing to pull them apart. "Stop! Stop!" Lisa and Malik ran over and finally managed to separate them. David, his face contorted with rage, shook off Malik's hand. "Forget it. Pointless." He spun and disappeared into the darkness. Elias stood rigid, his face grim, saying nothing.

The party was over. The night fell into a cold, suffocating silence, the echo of shock and fury hanging over the beach.

Back in the dormitory, Viola and Lisa were whispering in the dark. Viola described the scene on the beach, her voice a mix of shyness and tender excitement. "Lisa, that was the first kiss I ever dreamed of! I think... I might really be in love with

Elias. If not for the chaos, it would have been the most perfect night.”

“I know, I know. You guys have this insane connection. It was so thrilling and romantic!!”

But Lisa’s voice then dropped, tinged with anxiety. “If Elias leaves for America... you two will truly become like Altair and Vega. Jesus.”

“What? America? Elias is leaving?” Viola was struck by the sudden information. “Why didn’t I know anything about this?!”

“My mom mentioned it. His parents got new research positions at Yale, a huge opportunity, and they’re moving before the school year starts. It’s also great for his applications to the Ivy League. Malik said he’d miss his best friend.”

Viola froze with shock. Her heart instantly emptied. *Why didn’t he tell me? And why did everyone else already know? If he’s leaving... What did that kiss on the beach even mean?*

She tossed and turned that night, unable to sleep.

Early the next morning, heart still pounding, Viola mustered her courage and sent Elias a message,

asking to meet her on the beach.

The sea breeze was gentle, and the sun was just rising, casting a pale golden light over the shore, but the warmth of the morning did nothing to ease the tension of Viola.

Elias ran up happily, still wrapped in the memory of their kisses from last night. “Hi! Did you sleep well?”

She stared at his still-bruised face. The night of worry and sadness was instantly eclipsed by a sharp pang of concern. “I didn’t. Did you? Does your face still hurt?”

“Oh, don’t worry about this. It’s a badge of honor for a man, isn’t it?” Elias touched his cheek and grinned awkwardly.

Viola let out a small, forced laugh, but her thoughts tumbled back to last night. “Right... I guess you’ll just have to handle everything on your own soon. There won’t be any reason to share anything with me at all.”

Elias heard the accusation and the bitterness in her tone. “Hey, Viola, what’s wrong? you know I’ve ...

always... cared about you! I've never felt like this for anyone else!"

"I've thought about you too... I liked you, maybe more than I should have. But I guess I missed the important part where you were supposed to announce your major life changes before you decided to kiss me goodbye on the beach. I didn't even know you were moving across the ocean in a few days. I feel like a fool, thinking that kiss could be the beginning of something." Viola spilled out all her feelings for once, her voice sounded sad.

Elias stared at her, wide-eyed, a swirl of complex emotions choking him. He couldn't clarify his thoughts or articulate his desperate feelings, he didn't even know how to clarify, but blurting out the worst possible defense: "It's not fair... David came all this way, and... and you let him get close to you, didn't you?"

"What does David have to do with this? You know perfectly well nothing happened between him and me! I can't believe you'd even think that!" Viola's eyes filled with tears, her voice rising in distress.

Elias was genuinely stunned to see Viola so distraught. He opened his mouth but couldn't speak any single words.

“I knew it, Elias. I knew it! You were only acting out of jealousy or pathetic competitiveness last night! Now I understand why I was the last to know. Why does your life have nothing to do with me!”

“Viola, no! It's not what you think! I can't change anything. I can't...I don't...just don't want to...” Elias's eyes were brimming, but he couldn't find the words to confess everything he felt.

“Stop, Elias! Yes, you can't. You can't trust me, and you don't...you literally don't like me. You just wanted me there at that moment. I know it.” Viola turned and walked away, the tears finally streaming down her face.

Elias stood alone on the beach, replaying the painful scene. The farewell he had dreaded most had finally come. He had been terrified that telling her about America would shatter any possibility between them, so he foolishly clung to the hope that their connection could somehow survive. He never

imagined they would part like this. He hated himself:
*Why did I have to mention David? I love Viola for me,
not because of him! I was just jealous that David got
close to her! I was just terrified of losing her!*

The pain of saying goodbye was unbearable.

That day, they left the camp without a final glance,
without a proper farewell.

Viola only heard from Lisa that Elias had departed
with his parents, and that he hadn't seemed happy at
all that day.

After settling in America, Elias often replayed
those scenes on the beach in his mind, consumed by
deep regret.

On Viola's seventeenth birthday, he sent her a gift:
a delicate gold seashell necklace, which opened to
reveal a shimmering pearl, a tiny token of the heart
he could no longer hold close.

The card read:

Dearest Viola,

Happy 17th Birthday!

*I hope this gift can replace that awful memory on
the Dutch beach.*

VIOLA BENNET

In my heart, you'll always be the brilliant pearl.

Missing you.

Your Elias.

Viola opened the box, gazed at the necklace and the card, and tears ran freely down her cheeks. In the end, she never replied. Her heart was too full, too fragile to find the words.

Explore more about Viola Bennet

Official website

www.violabennet.com

Amazon book store

<https://amzn.eu/d/1LVsK9c>

Viola Bennet Jewelry

Etsy:

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Elaine Vaughn, lives in Bremen, Germany. She is the founder of brand Viola Bennet. Though a businesswoman by profession, she holds a Doctorate in Education and has a deep passion for writing, painting, and traveling.

Viola Bennet, born in Bremen Germany, a girl who loves art, music and logic. She once believed in cosmic romance, until her bond with her first love, Elias Meyer, was shattered by a misunderstanding too heavy to mend. He was the rhythm of her moonlit dances, the harmony of their garden duets, the first kiss by the sea—and the enduring regret in her heart.

Years later, Elias crashes back into her world following a groundbreaking discovery: ancient microbial life and mysterious symbols etched into Mars's red rock. The brilliant scientist becomes a global sensation, and once again, becomes a destiny Viola cannot escape.

The universe seems to conspire when Viola realizes the Martian symbols eerily resonate with an ancient stone she found years ago in Tanzania, tightening the threads of fate. But her heart holds the embers of another flame.

In the wild heat of Tanzania, she once fell into the arms of Javier, a passionate artist whose danger and fire awakened a spark where Elias had left ashes. That summer was a blur of thrilling Serengeti aerial dreams and perilous Kilimanjaro climbs, culminating in a betrayal that turned reality in their Switzerland's life into heartbreak.

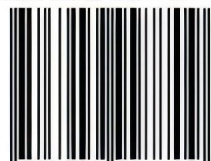
Now, Elias is unjustly blamed for a tragic accident, and Javier fights for his life in the aftermath. Viola embarks on a desperate double-rescue mission, spanning continents and plunging her into the truth, forcing her to confront the love she abandoned.

As Elias's team unveils a revelation that redefines humanity's origins, linking Earth and Mars in a primordial migration, Viola steps into her own brilliance, reclaiming her future and her voice.

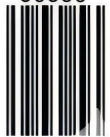
As Elias's team unveils a revelation that redefines humanity's origins, linking Earth and Mars in a primordial migration, Viola steps into her own brilliance, reclaiming her future and her voice.

Can Viola and Elias finally bridge the distance and the heartbreak of their past under the guidance of the stars? Who will she choose to write the romantic ending with?

ISBN 9783949997709



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