



METROPOLICKS

FELICIA LIN and VICTOR SCOTT RODRIGUEZ



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Felicia Lin and Victor Scott Rodriguez

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Metropolicks [mi-**trop**-*uh*-liks]

noun

1. A large, busy, international city (e.g. New York City) filled with varied stories of relationship adventures and misadventures.
2. A major urban center in which sexual activity is prominent, especially those involving the use of one's tongue.
3. A fast-paced, competitive metropolis where highly ambitious people focus on licking the competition and getting ahead in dating.

INTRODUCTION

Dating in New York is not for the faint of heart. With so many singles packed into the island of Manhattan and people marrying later in life, you'd think that there would be endless opportunities to find love. However, with so many options, it is easy to find yourself going through the revolving doors of dating. There are always fresh distractions—the newer, the better, or the trendier. Who has the time or patience to make relationships work? So, are the odds really in your favor in New York if you are looking for Mr. or Ms. Right?

To have a fighting chance you'll need a plan of attack and a support system. In fact, you'll need all the help you can get. You'll need an army to win this war. This army includes your friends, those you can trust, those who you can go to with the joy and the pain of your pursuit. Don't forget your friends' friends, and your acquaintances—you never know who you'll meet through these connections. And then, you will need a backup plan. So, suit up, put on your best armor—be it a little black dress or your sharpest looking suit. Lock and load your best pickup lines or your sexiest, most charming smile, because love is a battlefield. And as the saying goes, you may have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince or princess.

When you are single and have lived in New York long enough, you will probably have a few stories to share. We soon found out that this was truer than we could have imagined. As friends heard that we were working on this novel, a strange thing began happening. People started volunteering to share their dating stories with us.

While our novel was inspired in part by people's true-dating experiences in New York City, these experiences were used in a fictitious manner. The novel is a work of fiction and is a result of our creative imagination. Our intention was to create characters that were composites. Therefore, any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and unintentional.

Another unusual development happened during the writing of this book—when someone gave us legal consent to be mentioned in the book by name, with the caveat that none of his or her personal stories be included in the book. That led to several other people being mentioned in the book by their real names, and we followed the same protocol with them. Thus, the stories in this book are interspersed with the names of real people and real places.

In the opening scene of the book we'll introduce you to an ensemble of characters. Then, the perspective will shift into the first-person view as each character tells a tale from his or her point of view.

There are many stories to be told and others that are best kept private. We are here to tell the tales of a few New Yorkers brave enough to endure heartbreak and rejection in order to find love. In the words of the great poet Ovid, "Fortune and love favor the brave."

We wish to thank all who have contributed your stories, but, of course, we can't do so by name. In order to protect people's anonymity, we have changed their names, ethnicities, occupations, places of residence and identifiable physical characteristics, and in some instances,

the gender, national origin, religious views, and political views of those who have volunteered stories. In every instance, we have combined several stories within the same chapter, so that every chapter is in fact composite in nature.

One last thought: when a dating relationship goes awry, don't sweat it; it is not the end of the world. How do we know it is not the end of the world? Because it is already tomorrow in Taiwan.

Knowing and Not Knowing (TARA)

My friend Minh and I were sitting at a trendy hotel bar in the Flatiron district, deeply engaged in conversation about everything from dealing with the health issues of our aging parents to celebrity sightings. We were discussing “big love” and that undeniable feeling, when the relationship just seems right.

We talked about how big love is not to be mistaken for larger-than-life love, which is just so unhealthy. Larger-than-life love is like a sinkhole—it just takes over everything, throwing reason out the window, leaving you in a constant state of yearning and dissatisfaction, and feeling as if it is never enough.

Minh was telling me about this guy David, who she had just met at an Asian Young Professionals (AYP) event, a social networking organization for single Asians. We were definitely getting a little too engrossed in deep conversation for a Friday night. It was the end of another workweek, which should’ve meant that it was time to just kick back and relax.

A man standing at the bar and right beside me waiting for his drink looked over at us and introduced himself. “Hi, I’m Matt. Where are you ladies from?”

I had noticed him. He had dark brown hair and a clean-cut look. The bartender brought Matt a scotch on the rocks. Minh and I looked at each other. “Well, I’m not sure how to answer that. But, I’d say I’m a New Yorker. I’ve lived here for several years now,” I offered.

Matt set down his drink on the bar beside mine. “Well, I’ve lived in Connecticut, New York, Southern California, and Colorado. But I’m Irish. My grandparents actually came over here from Ireland.”

Minh looked over at Matt and said, “I’m from Hoi An in central Vietnam. I came here a few years ago to get my MBA.”

Straight to the point, and always very direct, Minh knows who she is, I thought.

Matt turned to me and asked, “So, what about you? I’m not sure how to ask this...” Matt’s voice trailed off as he looked at me, “But where are you from? I mean what’s your family background?”

I smiled and asked, “Why don’t you take a guess?”

“Well, I don’t think you’re Chinese... but maybe Thai, or Filipino?”

“Hmmm... close... I think I’ll leave you guessing,” I said in a sprightly way.

I thought to myself that the truth is, I didn't exactly know where I was from. When my birth mother had shown up with me, then a three-month-old baby at an orphanage in Thailand, she didn't have any identification with her. Though she could speak Thai, something about the way that she spoke made workers at the orphanage guess that she may have been a refugee who had escaped out of Cambodia.

As an adult, I learned that the orphanage had close ties with Thai human rights organizations and activists who helped Cambodians who were fleeing from the wrath of the Khmer Rouge. Thailand was the gateway to freedom for many Cambodian refugees, even years after the fall of Pol Pot. All my birth mother had told the orphanage was that her baby girl was named Chantara, and was born in the fourth month of the Khmer calendar. Because of that, the date of birth on my documents is a guesstimate and I don't know the exact date of my birth.

My exact country of origin remains a mystery even now because my given name, Chantara, is both a Cambodian and Thai name. In Khmer it means moon and stars, whereas in Thai it means moon and water. My adoptive parents had brought me over to the United States from Thailand and raised me in Connecticut. Growing up, no one knew exactly how to pronounce my name, so I just decided to make things easier and to go by the name of Tara.

Matt broke my train of thought, "Well, my ex-girlfriend was from Thailand. People from Thailand, they are good people. I met her parents and they were the sweetest people."

"So, what happened to her, your ex?" Minh chimed in.

"Oh, she was kind of young and immature. What about you two ladies? What are the two of you doing here? Just the two of you?"

Minh took one last sip of her martini and set it down, "Well, I am kind of with someone."

Matt leaned over and looked at Minh and me with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking. We are not with each other. The two of us," I gestured from Minh to myself, "We are not together!"

Matt's phone rang and he reached into his pocket to answer it. "Yeah, I'm still here. It's at the corner of Park Avenue and 28th Street. Sure, come on over," he said to the person on the other end.

Minh and I looked at each other, and we knew it was time to call it a night.

Matt hung up his phone.

"Well, it's time to move on now. We've got to meet up with some other friends uptown," Minh announced.

"It was so nice meeting you girls. Too bad you're not sticking around. One of my buddies is on his way over," Matt said as Minh and I put on our jackets.

Outside on the sidewalk, the two of us laughed.

Minh spoke first, “Isn’t that always when it happens—right when you’re taken or getting involved with someone, that’s when some handsome guy tries to pick you up!”

“Well, it looks as if you are really into this new guy you told me about. It seems like human nature, that when you’re taken, somehow men know this and then you somehow seem even more attractive to them.” Seeing Minh eyeing the street for a cab, I told her, “It’s always so great catching up with you!” Minh hailed a cab then we hugged before she got in.

As I walked home, I thought about how it must be nice to be the sort of person who knows exactly who she is, where she’s from, where she’s going, and what she wants to do, like Minh. In the past when people have asked and tried to guess my ethnic background, I usually played along. It was just easier. They guessed Thai, Singaporean, Taiwanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese—you name it. If it’s been guessed, I’ve played the part. I’m not entirely sure if I am Thai or Cambodian.

It was a short walk home and soon I was in my apartment. I glanced at a photograph of my adoptive parents displayed on one of the bookshelves in my living room as I walked into my bedroom to get ready for bed. It was my favorite photograph of them taken in Thailand. That’s where they had met, when both were there on Rotary Peace Fellowships. After returning to the United States together and several years of marriage, they discovered that they were not able to have children. So, they decided to go back to Thailand to see if they could find a child to adopt.

My parents did their best to help me understand my roots. While growing up, they had told me about the shared history of Thailand and Cambodia. As a teenager and I’d watched the *Killing Fields* with my parents, and the topic of Cambodia’s war-torn past had come up. Looking back on it now, perhaps it was a way for my parents to bring up a discussion on this topic with me.

They had several albums of gorgeous photos from their time in Southeast Asia. As a child, I would flip through the albums imagining my parents in this faraway land, posing for photos. My favorite photos were those of Thai and Cambodian traditional dancers. Their elaborate headpieces and jewelry captured my imagination, but I could never tell which was Thai and which was Cambodian. Both cultures seemed quite similar. My parents had told me that both had roots in Khmer culture.

Throughout my childhood, my mother Angela, would periodically prepare traditional Cambodian and Thai dishes for me. My favorite was khao thom, which is a rice soup that’s eaten with pickled vegetables, fermented soy beans, and leftovers. I knew that all of this was a part of my heritage, but I had never been back to Asia since I’d been adopted at the age of three.

A Beautiful Friendship (MONTROYA and Luana)

One warm spring evening, I walked across the street to Marseille on Restaurant Row in the Times Square district. It was an unpretentious, spacious and elegant restaurant. As soon as I entered, I saw where Luana was seated. She waved when she saw me and I made my way to her. I greeted her by shaking her hand and kissing her on the cheek in one simultaneous motion. Then, we both sat down and surveyed the menu.

“So, who are you really? And what were you before? What did you do and what did you think?” I asked Luana facetiously.

“*Casablanca* right? Great movie. But how did you know I would catch the reference?” Luana responded.

“I get the strong feeling that you are a romantic.”

“I am, although most people think I am a flirt,” Luana said dryly.

“As the old expression goes... it takes one to know one. I am a romantic and a flirt also.”

Over the course of our conversation, I discovered that Luana was quite smart. She had attended some of the best boarding schools in Europe. Her undergraduate degree was from Stanford in statistics, and she also had a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in physics from Yale University. She had used her Ph.D. in physics to get a job as a top financial analyst on Wall Street. I realized that due to her educational background she didn’t speak English with a traditional Brazilian accent.

“I’m very glad you called me for lunch. I wanted to know that you were okay after the other night,” I told her.

“You’ve given me hope that there are still some nice guys in New York. I really want to thank you for taking care of me. I was a drunken mess the other night and you were great. Really great,” Luana said reaching to touch my hand.

“I know that Gianni seems to have had a wandering eye. Sorry about that.”

“He would have sex with anyone female. She could be old or ugly, it wouldn’t matter. I have never felt comfortable having any of my women friends around him.”

“How many times has he cheated on you?”

“That I know of? At least thirty times.”

“Thirty times?! Why in the world are you still with him?”

The waitress came over to take our orders, disrupting our conversation.

“Hey, I thought you were Gianni’s friend? Aren’t you going to stick up for him?” Luana asked, picking up the conversation where we’d left off, after the waitress had walked away.

“No. I’ve been thinking about this for a while. I like Gianni, but he’s more of an acquaintance than a friend. The cheating thing is quite bad. I really don’t want to be guilty by association.”

“Interesting. So, you really are a nice guy.”

“I’d like to think I am a decent guy, not necessarily a nice guy.”

“What’s the difference?”

“As I said earlier, I am a flirt also, actually, a notorious flirt. But, I have a code of ethics I follow. I don’t cheat.”

“So, you have a girlfriend?”

“Been on again and off again with someone who is driving me crazy. Her name is Evelyn. All my friends say I should move on.”

“Sounds like we are in the same boat. I have tried to break up with Gianni many times and I keep going back to him.”

“Why?”

The waitress brought our food but I was more interested in hearing her line of reasoning than the food.

“I love his body. He is also the best lover I’ve ever had. He knocks on my door at three in the morning. When I tell him to go away, he keeps knocking until I let him in. I don’t want him to wake up the neighbors. Then, I yell and scream at him.”

“I am assuming you screaming and yelling at three in the morning would annoy the neighbors also?”

“Yes, it does but guys like him take all that yelling and then afterwards he says he is sorry and we have sex again. This has happened over and over. For three years I have been trying to break up with him.”

“Three years? Bugger! I have only known him half a year. Let me ask you a dumb question. Why not report him to the police when he knocks on your door? If you have a doorman, tell him not to let Gianni up.”

“Are you serious? You are taking my side?”

“I have been thinking about this ever since I met Gianni. I don’t think it’s right what he is doing to all these women, and especially to you.”

“After a while, I actually didn’t even know if I could say that I was the one that he was cheating on. You do know he is technically still married, right?”

“Are you serious? I didn’t know that.”

“He is separated, but not divorced. So, these past three years, he was technically cheating on his wife with me. Although they are no longer living under the same roof, I’m not so sure just how ‘separated’ they actually are. So, the crazy thought is, am I the one he is cheating with or the one he is cheating on? Because there have been other women besides me.”

“You need to set boundaries and take control of the situation for yourself. I mean he cheated on you over thirty times. So, now, you need to do something drastic that gets his attention.”

“Right, I want to put a stop to this,” Luana said with conviction.

“Well, I have never suggested this to anyone before, but this is an exception. You should check out this website where women post about men who they want to warn other women about. I know someone who did this to her ex-husband because he cheated on her. Put him on it and it will definitely get his attention.”

“Oh really? Can you write that down for me?” Luana asked as she handed me a piece of paper and pen from her purse.

“Sure,” I said as I took the pen and started writing the website’s address on the piece of paper.

“Tell me, what happened with your friend whose ex-husband was cheating on her?” Luana asked with curiosity.

“Well, that’s what led to him becoming her ex-husband. There was no turning back for them after that,” I explained.

“I didn’t have a cheating ex-husband, but I have been divorced for other reasons.”

“Do you mind if I ask what happened?” I inquired as I returned the pen and paper to her.

“We had been together for a few years when I unexpectedly got pregnant. We were so happy about it because we had talked about having a family and it’s what we both wanted. So, we got married immediately and started planning for our family. But, then, I had a miscarriage at three months.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” I said.

“It was devastating. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to try again right away, but about a year later, I got pregnant again. Miguel was overjoyed but I was more cautiously optimistic. I didn’t want to tell anyone until I was in the second trimester,” Luana explained and then paused.

“I see,” I said waiting for Luana to continue.

“It was a girl, Marisol. When she came into our lives, everything changed forever. And, then, one day, just like that, she was gone,” Luana said recalling the sad memory. “It was sudden infant death syndrome.”

“I’m really sorry to hear that you went through that,” I said as I put my hand on Luana’s.

“It now seems like a lifetime ago. The marriage was just not the same after that. I was the one who found her,” Luana said getting choked up as her eyes welled up with tears.

“We don’t have to continue talking about this if it’s too upsetting,” I said as I reached into my pocket and handed Luana a handkerchief.

Luana dabbed her eyes with the handkerchief and said, “No, no, it’s okay. I feel I can share this with you. So... after that, the nursery became a painful reminder for me. I wanted to redecorate and repaint it, but Miguel couldn’t bring himself to do it. He didn’t pressure me about trying again, but even though he didn’t say it, his actions told me that’s what he wanted eventually.”

“You obviously needed time to heal, but Miguel didn’t see that?” I asked.

“At the time, I might have felt that way, but I now realize that we just had different ways of dealing with grief.”

“Did you want to have a kid with Gianni?”

“When I met Gianni three years ago at a party, and I had been divorced for a while. I was in a better place and had thought about one day trying to have a child again. I did think about having a baby with Gianni, but now I realize that he is so irresponsible and immature. If I had a kid with him, it would be like having two kids. I’m not sure he could handle the responsibility of being a father. Although, you never really know how someone is going to be when the child, their child actually arrives. But with men in New York, you have to keep it a secret that you want a baby. That makes them run away.”

“Nobody wants to feel like they are being used and for men, the four biggies that we are used for are money, sex, citizenship, and sperm,” I explained.

“Sperm?”

“What I mean is when a woman wants you more for the ability to give her a baby than for being her boyfriend or husband.”

“I want the whole package. The sperm, the dick, and the baby,” Luana said cheekily as she handed the handkerchief back to me.

I realized that her mood had improved and then I said, “You mean the sperm, the penis, and the baby? You don’t want a dick.” Luana laughed upon hearing this and, then, I added, “I think you deserve a decent guy.”

“Thanks for your advice. I’ll keep you posted.”

The waitress came over with the check. Luana immediately grabbed it. “This one is definitely on me.”

“Remember the last scene from the movie *Casablanca*?”

“Very funny!” Luana said understanding what I was referring to.

“Yes, Luana, this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship,” I said with a warm smile.

Missionary Dating (NINE)

I am very committed to being a Christian, but my world isn't black and white, which is kind of ironic for me to say since I really am half black (that's my father's side) and half white (that's my mother's side). My dad is African-American while my mom is German, which gives me dual citizenship—American and German. I've been blessed with the best of both of my parents' genes. I have my dad's height and my mother's green eyes. People can't always tell what my ethnicity is. Sometimes, it's fun to have them try to guess.

My parents met at the Nienburg Abbey, a thousand-year-old Benedictine monastery in the town of Nienburg, in the Saxony Anhalt area of Germany. At the time, my dad was stationed at Ramstein Air Force Base in the German Rhineland as an Air Force Captain. My father, James, has always been fascinated with old churches, so he decided to visit the abbey, while on leave. My mother, Astrid, was a tour guide there, and my father ended up in her group—that's how they met.

A few months later, my father proposed and they arranged to get married at the abbey. I was born in Germany and my parents decided to name me after the town where they met and were wed. We lived at Ramstein Air Force Base until I turned ten, which accounts for my fluency in German. Then, my father was promoted and we moved to MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. We kept moving around to different bases, both in the U.S. and abroad until we finally wound up at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

I've always thought that the intent behind my name was romantic. But when I started going to school in the U.S., it wasn't fun being teased about it. The kids at school thought, what kind of a name is Nienburg for a girl? Later on, I adopted the nickname "Nine." Surprisingly, my nickname has kind of worked in my favor. Introducing myself as Nine to guys, has often resulted in some very interesting reactions, which is not a bad thing at all.

Looking at my parents' marriage and relationship, that's what I want, but dating for a Christian woman like me has never been easy in New York. Even, with all of the churches here, you would think that it would be easy to find a good guy. But, it wasn't always like this. The church I've been attending for the past three years, The Journey Church, was one of the first churches in Manhattan that was "cool" and attracted people my age. It's a contemporary church that opens its services with a live rock music band performance. Now, even with many other churches in Manhattan similar to The Journey, it's still tough.

My problem is that I am looking for the trifecta in Christian dating. He has to be cool, cute, and Christian—the three C's. I guess tall would also be a requirement. Most guys would be cool and not cute, or cute and not cool, or cute and cool but not tall. I know this makes me sound a bit like Goldilocks—constantly saying this porridge is too hot or this porridge is too cold—but so far I haven't been able to find the porridge that is just right. I did come close once with Paul, who I met at a fundraiser in Midtown for Howard University. We started a long distance

relationship since he was based in San Francisco and working on a startup. He was indeed cool, cute and Christian.

I knew how passionate Paul was about the startup and I admired his ambition. The idea of living in New York appealed to him. He had said he'd love to live in New York one day. That was the long-term plan, but he wanted to get the startup off the ground first. Over time I saw him less and less frequently and our relationship became on again and off again. Then Paul said he couldn't be exclusive with me anymore. That's when I realized that things had changed and we were not on such solid ground anymore.

After it didn't work out with Paul, who actually had the three C's, I decided to go back to what is known as "missionary dating." That is, I dated guys who weren't Christian. In doing so, I hoped that somehow my great looks and dazzling personality (and of course my humility, just kidding) would get them interested in attending my church. The idea was that they'd eventually consider Christianity as a way to get to know me better.

Before Paul there was, Kurt who was German and a lapsed Lutheran. He had stopped going to church in his freshman year at college. But after dating me, he started attending The Journey Church. We were together for two months, but then I started to get this weird feeling that somehow he knew things that he could only know by reading my emails. After I got into a fight with him, I would write out my feelings in an email, but I never sent the email, and just kept it saved as a draft email. I'd look at what I'd written down from time to time and after a while I would delete it.

Kurt always seemed to know the right things to ask me, and what to apologize for after our arguments. This made me suspicious. So, I decided to do a test. I told a girlfriend that I would be sending her a bogus email and for her not to respond. In the bogus email, I said that I was having an affair with someone else behind Kurt's back.

It didn't take long for Kurt to call and start probing me. Eventually, he started accusing me of having an affair with someone else. I told him that I'd specifically written about the affair in an email as a test and sent it my friend. I told him that none of it was true and, then, I also asked him how he could possibly know about the email. He knew that he had been caught so he confessed that he had been aware of my email password for almost the entire time we were together. I was furious and told him that not only had he violated my privacy but also the privacy of all my friends, since he was reading their emails to me as well. So, things ended abruptly with him.

More recently, there was this guy at work, Yves, who I had a major flirtation with. Our first date was brunch together and he attended The Journey Church three times. Yves was a little on the short side, but that didn't stop me from making out with him from time to time. He was a good guy, though he seemed to be too controlling for me. Then, I found out from a co-worker that he already had a girlfriend in Paris and that he was waiting for her to come back to New York City. So, I decided that I really didn't want to be any guy's plan B or filler until the real girlfriend returned.

Then, The Journey Church did a sermon series on dating and they weren't so keen on missionary dating. They may have a point because it hasn't been working out for me, anyway.

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