



Sushi for One?

Copyright © 2007 by Camy Tang

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tang, Camy, 1972–

Sushi for one? / Camy Tang.

p. cm.—(Sushi series)

ISBN-10: 0-310-27398-6

ISBN-13: 978-0-310-27398-1

1. Dating (Social customs)—Fiction. 2. Man-woman relationships—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3620.A6845S87 2007

813'.6—dc22

2007006672

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers printed in this book are offered as a resource to you. These are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of Zondervan, nor do we vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published in association with the Books & Such Literary Agency, 52 Mission Circle, Suite 122, PMB 170, Santa Rosa, California 95407-5370. www.booksandsuch.biz.

Interior design by Michelle Espinoza

Printed in the United States of America

ONE



Eat and leave. That's all she had to do.
If Grandma didn't kill her first for being late.

Lex Sakai raced through the open doorway to the Chinese restaurant and was immediately immersed in conversation, babies' wails, clashing perfumes, and stale sesame oil. She tripped over the threshold and almost turned her ankle. Stupid pumps. Man, she hated wearing heels.

Her cousin Chester sat behind a small table next to the open doorway.

"Hey Chester."

"Oooh, you're late. Grandma isn't going to be happy. Sign over here." He gestured to the guestbook that was almost drowned in the pink lace glued to the edges.

"What do I do with this?" Lex dropped the Babies R Us box on the table.

Chester grabbed the box and flipped it behind him with the air of a man who'd been doing this for too long and wanted out from behind the frilly welcome table.

Lex understood how he felt. So many of their cousins were having babies, and there were several mixed Chinese-Japanese marriages in the family. Therefore, most cousins opted for these huge—not to mention tiring—traditional Chinese Red Egg and Ginger parties to "present" their newborns, even though the majority of the family was Japanese American.

Lex bent to scrawl her name in the guestbook. Her new sheath dress sliced into her abs, while the fabric strained across her back muscles. Trish had convinced her to buy the dress, and it actually gave her sporty silhouette some curves, but its fitted design prevented movement. She should've worn her old loose-fitting dress instead. She finished signing the book and looked back to Chester. "How's the food?" The only thing worthwhile about these noisy events. Lex would rather be at the beach.

"They haven't even started serving."

"Great. That'll put Grandma in a good mood."

Chester grimaced, then gestured toward the far corner where there was a scarlet-draped wall and a huge gold dragon wall-hanging. "Grandma's over there."

"Thanks." Yeah, Chester knew the drill, same as Lex. She had to go over to say hello as soon as she got to the party—before Grandma saw *her*, anyway—or Grandma would be peeved and stick Lex on her "Ignore List" until after Christmas.

Lex turned, then stopped. Poor Chester. He looked completely forlorn—not to mention too bulky—behind that silly table. Of all her cousins, he always had a smile and a joke for her. "Do you want to go sit down? I can man the table for you for a while. As long as you don't forget to bring me some food." She winked at him.

Chester flashed his toothy grin, and the weary lines around his face expanded into his normal laugh lines. "I appreciate that, but don't worry about me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. My sister's going to bring me something—she's got all the kids at her table, so she'll have plenty for me. But thanks, Lex."

"You'd do the same for me."

Lex wiggled in between the round tables and inadvertently jammed her toe into the protruding metal leg of a chair. To accommodate the hefty size of Lex's extended family, the restaurant had loaded the room with tables and chairs so it resembled a game of Tetris. Once bodies sat in the chairs, a chopstick could barely squeeze

through. And while Lex prided herself on her athletic 18-percent body fat, she wasn't a chopstick.

The Chinese waiters picked that exact moment to start serving the food.

Clad in black pants and white button-down shirts, they filed from behind the ornate screen covering the doorway to the kitchen, huge round platters held high above their heads. They slid through the crowded room like salmon—how the heck did they do that?—while it took all the effort Lex had to push her way through the five inches between an aunty and uncle's chairs. Like birds of prey, the waiters descended on her as if they knew she couldn't escape.

Lex dodged one skinny waiter with plates of fatty pork and thumb-sized braised octopus. Another waiter almost gouged her eye out with his platter. She ducked and shoved at chairs, earning scathing glances from various uncles and aunts.

Finally, Lex exploded from the sea of tables into the open area by the dragon wall-hanging. She felt like she'd escaped from quicksand. Grandma stood and swayed in front of the horrifying golden dragon, holding her newest great-granddaughter, the star of the party. The baby's face glowed as red as the fabric covering the wall. Probably scared of the dragon's green buggy eyes only twelve inches away. Strange, Grandma seemed to be favoring her right hip.

“Hi, Grandma.”

“Lex! Hi sweetie. You're a little late.”

Translation: You'd better have a good excuse.

Lex thought about lying, but aside from the fact that she couldn't lie to save her life, Grandma's eyes were keener than a sniper's. “I'm sorry. I was playing grass volleyball and lost track of time.”

The carefully lined red lips curved down. “You play sports too much. How are you going to attract a man when you're always sweating?”

Like she was now? Thank goodness for the fruity body spritz she had marinated herself in before she got out of her car.

“That's a pretty dress, Lex. New, isn't it?”

How did she do that? With as many grandchildren as she had, Grandma never failed to notice clothes, whereas Lex barely registered that she wasn't naked. "Thanks. Trish picked it out."

"It's so much nicer than that ugly floppy thing you wore to your cousin's wedding."

Lex gritted her teeth. *Respect your grandmother. Do not open your mouth about something like showing up in a polka-dotted bikini.*

"Actually, Lex, I'm glad you look so ladylike this time. I have a friend's son I want you to meet—"

Oh, no. Not again. "Does he speak English?"

Grandma drew herself to her full height, which looked a little silly because Lex still towered over her. "Of course he does."

"Employed?"

"Yes. Lex, your attitude—"

"Christian?"

"Now why should that make a difference?"

Lex widened innocent eyes. "Religious differences account for a lot of divorces."

"I'm not asking you to marry him, just to meet him."

Liar. "I appreciate how much you care about me, but I'll find my own dates, thanks." Lex smiled like she held a knife blade in her teeth. When Grandma got pushy like this, Lex had more backbone than the other cousins.

"I wouldn't be so concerned, but you don't date at all—"

Not going there. "Is this Chester's niece?" Lex's voice rose an octave as she tickled the baby's Pillsbury-Doughboy stomach. The baby screamed on. "Hey there, cutie, you're so big, betcha having fun, is Grandma showing you off, well, you just look pretty as a picture, are you enjoying your Red Egg and Ginger party? Okay, Grandma, I have to sit down. Bye."

Before Grandma could say another word, Lex whisked away into the throng of milling relatives. Phase one, accomplished. Grandmother engaged. Retreat commencing before more nagging words like "dating" and "marriage" sullied the air.

Next to find her cousins—and best friends—Trish, Venus, and Jenn, who were saving a seat for her. She headed toward the back where all the other unmarried cousins sat as far away from Grandma as physically possible.

Their table was scrunched into the corner against towering stacks of unused chairs—like the restaurant could even hold more chairs. “Lex!” Trish flapped her raised hand so hard, Lex expected it to fly off at any moment. Next to her, Venus lounged, as gorgeous as always and looking bored, while Jennifer sat quietly on her other side, twirling a lock of her long straight hair. On either side of them . . .

“Hey, where’s my seat?”

Venus’s wide almond eyes sent a sincere apology. “We failed you, babe. We had a seat saved next to Jenn, but then . . .” She pointed to where the back of a portly aunty’s chair had rammed up against their table. “We had to remove the chair, and by then, the rest were filled.”

“Traitors. You should have shoved somebody under the table.”

Venus grinned evilly. “You’d fit under there, Lex.”

Trish whapped Venus in the arm. “Be nice.”

A few of the other cousins looked at them strangely, but they got that a lot. The four of them became close when they shared an apartment during college, but even more so when they all became Christian. No one else understood their flaws, foibles, and faith.

Lex had to find someplace to sit. At the very least, she wanted to snarf some overpriced, high calorie, high cholesterol food at this torturous party.

She scanned the sea of black heads, gray heads, dyed heads, small children’s heads with upside-down ricebowl haircuts, and teenager heads with highlighting and funky colors.

There. A table with an empty chair. Her cousin Bobby, his wife, his mother-in-law, and his brood. Six—count ’em, six—little people under the age of five.

Lex didn’t object to kids. She liked them. She enjoyed coaching her girls’ volleyball club team. But these were Bobby’s kids. The 911

operators knew them by name. The local cops drew straws on who would have to go to their house when they got a call.

However, it might not be so bad to sit with Bobby and family. Kids ate less than adults, meaning more food for Lex.

“Hi, Bobby. This seat taken?”

“No, go ahead and sit.” Bobby’s moon-face nodded toward the empty chair.

Lex smiled at his nervous wife, who wrestled with an infant making intermittent screeching noises. “Is that . . .” *Oh great. Boxed yourself in now. Name a name, any name.* “Uh . . . Kyle?”

The beleaguered mom’s smile darted in and out of her grimace as she tried to keep the flailing baby from squirming into a face-plant on the floor. “Yes, this is Kylie. Can you believe she’s so big?” One of her sons lifted a fork. “No, sweetheart, put the food down—!”

The deep-fried missile sailed across the table, trailing a tail of vegetables and sticky sauce. Lex had protected her face from volleyballs slammed at eighty miles an hour, but she’d never dodged multi-shots of food. She swatted away a flying net of lemony shredded lettuce, but a bullet of sauce-soaked fried chicken nailed her right in the chest.

Yuck. Well, good thing she could wash—oops, no, she hadn’t worn her normal cotton dress. This was the new silk one. The one with the price tag that made her gasp, but also made her look like she actually had a waist instead of a plank for a torso. The dress with the “dry-clean only” tag.

“Oh! I’m sorry, Lex. Bad boy. Look what you did.” Bobby’s wife leaned across the table with a napkin held out, still clutching her baby whose foot was dragging through the chow mein platter.

The little boy sitting next to Lex shouted in laughter. Which wouldn’t have been so bad if he hadn’t had a mouth full of chewed bok choy in garlic sauce.

Regurgitated cabbage rained on Lex’s chest, dampening the sunny lemon chicken. The child pointed at the pattern on her dress and squealed as if he had created a Vermeer. The other children laughed with him.

“Hey boys! That’s not nice.” Bobby glared at his sons, but otherwise didn’t stop shoveling salt-and-pepper shrimp into his mouth.

Lex scrubbed at the mess, but the slimy sauces refused to transfer from her dress onto the polyester napkin, instead clinging to the blue silk like mucus. Oh man, disgustamundo. Lex’s stomach gurgled. Why was every other part of her athlete’s body strong except for her stomach?

She needed to clean herself up. Lex wrestled herself out of the chair and bumped an older man sitting behind her. “Sorry.” The violent motion made the nausea swell, then recede. *Don’t be silly. Stop being a wimp.* But her already sensitive stomach had dropped the call with her head.

Breathe. In. Out. No, not through your nose. Don’t look at that boy’s drippy nose. Turn away from the drooling baby.

She needed fresh air in her face. She didn’t care how rude it was, she was leaving now.

“There you are, Lex.”

What in the world was Grandma doing at the far end of the restaurant? This was supposed to be a safe haven. Why would Grandma take a rare venture from the other side where the “more important” family members sat?

“My goodness, Lex! What happened to you?”

“I sat next to Bobby’s kids.”

Grandma’s powdered face scrunched into a grimace. “Here, let me go to the restroom with you.” The bright eyes strayed again to the mess on the front of her dress. She gasped.

Oh, no, what else? “What is it?” Lex asked.

“You never wear nice clothes. You always wear that hideous black thing.”

“We’ve already been over this—”

“I never noticed that you have no bosom. No wonder you can’t get a guy.”

Lex’s jaw felt like a loose hinge. The breath stuck in her chest until she forced a painful cough. “*Grandma!*”

Out of the corner of her eye, Lex could see heads swivel. Grandma's voice carried better than a soccer commentator at the World Cup.

Grandma bent closer to peer at Lex's chest. Lex jumped backward, but the chair behind her wouldn't let her move very far.

Grandma straightened with a frighteningly excited look on her face. "I know what I'll do."

God, now would be a good time for a waiter to brain her with a serving platter.

Grandmother gave a gleeful smile and clapped her hands. "Yes, it's perfect. I'll pay for breast implants for you!"