

THE CORINTHIAN RULES/Chick Lit/80,000 words

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Start each chapter one-third to halfway down a new page.

Chapter One

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"All right, you lovely single ladies, come on up for the bouquet toss."

Rats. She should have sneaked off to the restroom earlier.

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Trish ducked to hide from the Master of Ceremonies, her skeletal Uncle Charley. He stood at the front of the large banquet room in his rumpled black tuxedo, his wisps of wiry grey hair floating several inches above his near-bald head. Light from the overhead fluorescent fixtures glared on his oversized glasses as he swung his head back and forth, seeking innocent maidens to capture.

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There were two good things about the table configuration in Chinese wedding banquets: One--there was no head table, so Trish didn't have to sit like a conspicuous pink bon-bon in her bridesmaid's gown. And two--the large round tables made it possible for her to hide behind an old uncle's shiny head, or an auntie's black-dyed beehive hairdo.

She hunched over her dinner plate, squeezing herself behind Aunt Lena's large bulk. She stared down at the congealing clams in salty black bean sauce and pretended she hadn't heard the booming announcement. Maybe she would go unnoticed.

Laughter and chatter spiraled around her in English, Japanese and Mandarin while the rich aroma of beef and broccoli mingled with the sweet-sour tang of Chinese five-spice and strong black pepper. Sitting around the table, her parents and a few of her closest aunts and

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uncles picked at the last of the deep-fried lobster dumplings and crispy Peking duck.

Surprisingly, no one glanced at her. No one sighed and lamented, "Trish, you're still not married?"

She always bit her tongue so she wouldn't say something like, "Oh, my husband came, but he's stashed in the car trunk."

Or, "No, I've decided to dedicate my life to finding a cure for cancer."

Or even better, "What's the use? I think I'll join a convent."

Yeah, that would go over well. If her relatives weren't mentioning her marital status *ad nauseum*, they were scolding her for not coming to Buddhist temple anymore.

Besides, her Bible study that week had been on the fruits of the Spirit. Love, patience, kindness, self-control. That meant no glaring, gritting her teeth, rolling her eyes, snapping back, or uncouth behavior in general. Or at least while she sat next to her mother, who would *whap* her chopsticks on Trish's knuckles.

But no one seemed to have heard Uncle Charley's call to the single women, which also sounded like Trish's death knoll. Aunty Jill wiped the plum sauce globbing her son's mouth while Uncle Mark scrubbed at his tiny sticky hands. Uncle Russell reached for a golden-brown drumstick when Aunt Elisha wasn't looking. Aunty Yumi served Uncle Garret more steaming jasmine rice.

No one prodded, "There you go, Trish. Here's your chance." No one even remarked, "What? What did he say?"

Hm, maybe she'd be able to escape the dreaded wedding ritual...

But Uncle Charley, having changed the diapers of many of the young ladies present, started calling out names. "Deborah Fong, come on up to the dance floor. Eloise, I see you sneaking off. You too, Amanda. No, just because you're dating a guy doesn't mean you're exempt."

Then Aunt Lena shifted her chair and exposed Trish's bubblegum-pink skirts.

"Trish Sato, I see you hiding."

She was had. She stalled, patting her hair in its French twist and brushing nonexistent crumbs from her lap. Uncle Charley was getting old and just might forget--

"C'mon, Trish. We're waiting."

She heaved a long-suffering sigh as she hauled herself to her feet. Her mother hissed, "Smile. Stop looking like a martyr."

Trish glowered. Mom must have forgotten the embarrassing bridal tosses in her own youth.

Why in the world wouldn't a girl want to stand in front of a roomful of people and make a fool of herself? Who wouldn't want to leap and fight for a stupid bunch of flowers to win the title, "Next aging spinster who wishes she were married?"

Not to mention the public shame of a beaming mother who says in front of everyone, "See, honey, this proves you'll get a man sometime."

Bad enough when Aunties and Grandmas keep nagging, "So when are you getting a boyfriend? You're not getting any younger. You need to honor your mother with grandchildren before she dies."

It wasn't that she didn't want a relationship with a nice guy. Especially if he happened to be six feet tall with broad shoulders, a chiseled face and dark bedroom eyes. She just didn't like being pestered, prodded and provoked about her single state.

Trish's cousins had hit on the clever ploy of holding a little girl during the bouquet toss. The baby may be three months old but she was still a single female. Then the child reached for the bouquet and eased the social pressure and shame off the older woman. Cousin Sophia captured her niece while cousin Emily snatched baby Marie on her way to the front.

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