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SARONG PARTY GIRLS

Written by **Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan**

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SARONG PARTY GIRLS

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ALLEN & UNWIN

Author's Note

This book is written in Singlish, which is the patois that most Singaporeans speak to one another. It's a tossed salad of the different languages and Chinese dialects that the country's multiethnic population speaks—English, Malay, Mandarin, Hokkien, Teochew and more. It's packed with attitude and humor and often is deliciously vulgar. Despite its allure, it has been the target of the Singapore government's "Speak Good English" campaigns in the past. Fortunately, Singlish has turned out to be like a weed—it lives on.

CHAPTER 1

Aiyoh, I tell you. If we do nothing, we are confirm getting into bang balls territory. We have to figure out how to make this happen—and we have to do it now.

After all, we've wasted enough time already. And we don't have any more time to waste! We are not young anymore, you know—Fann just turned twenty-seven, my twenty-seventh birthday is two months away and Imo's is not far behind. If we don't get married, engaged or even nail down a boyfriend soon—my god, we might as well go ahead and book a room at Singapore Casket because our lives would already be over. In many ways, in Singapore, our kind of age is already considered a bit left on the shelf. Ordinarily, I don't heck care about such things. Hallo—Jazzy here knows she's quite power. Usually, unless the guy is blind or stupid or some shit, whatever guy I have my eye on I also can get, even at my age. You ask any bookie out there—my odds are damn good.

But it's true that Singaporean men are a bit fussy—especially when it comes to older girls. But luckily for us, we still have one big hope: ang moh guys. That's what we need to be thinking about. These white guys—they really catch no ball about Asian ages. Us twenty-something-year-old Asian girls, if you wear a tight tight dress or short short skirt, these ang mohs will still steam over you. (Some of them even go for the really old ones—thirty-year-old women also have chance!)

Even so, we cannot waste time. And we must be serious, be-

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cause once you manage to marry a white guy, then you are only one step away from the number one champion status symbol in Singapore—a half ang moh kid. The Chanel of babies! But, how to get an ang moh husband?

I used to think getting an ang moh husband was quite easy to do. I mean—hello, we girls are always out there, meeting ang mohs, letting them buy drinks for us, dance dance rubba rubba a bit, so surely one day we'll just naturally end up with an ang moh husband, right? At least that was the thinking lah. Recently though, I realized something that started making me nervous about achieving our goal. And it only hit me on that super cock night—the one where we lost Sher.

I tell you, I cannot even talk about that night right now without vomiting blood. Sher is so pretty, so sweet, so thin, has such fair skin. She could have had any guy she wanted!

After that night, I realized that yes, we've been quite focused over the years. If you count up all the guys our group has dated since secondary school, most of them are ang mohs. Not always good quality ones—some of them, I have to admit, are the don't-wear-suits-to-work type—but still, in this small country, to be able to say that most of our boyfriends and flings have come from England or some shit is quite good lah. Most girls here end up with local boyfriends the whole time. What nonsense. I tell you, if an SBS bus runs me over on the street tomorrow, Jazzy here will go up there with no regrets.

Once we lost Sher though, I realized that our ang moh husband strategy was not so good because . . . we had no strategy! You ask Sun Tzu or Lee Kuan Yew, they confirm will say that every important thing also must have strategy. I tell you—if only we had paid closer attention to all that shit during Chinese proverb classes. If we had, maybe Sher would still be with us today.

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So, first things first—must call a meeting. After work: Wala Wala bar at Holland Village. Of the four of us, there were only three left—me, Fann and Imo. Time to get serious.

Long time ago when we were in secondary school, the four of us used to be quite shy about coming to Holland Village. This neighborhood is not say super atas—although the hawker center there is damn bloody expensive. One stupid plate of wanton mee can cost you four dollars and fifty cents! If your family is printing money and you have all the cash in the world to pay American prices for Singaporean food then OK lah, please—you just go ahead. Also, you know how things are around here sometimes. If you are not ang moh and don't speak good English or wear a school uniform from one of the expat schools or at least one of the right kinds of schools, people will sometimes look at you a bit funny. Like, why are you hanging out here? Don't you have your own kampong to squat in? That kind of cock attitude.

But once we got a bit older and started going on dates with ang mohs who sometimes brought us to Holland Village, we started to see the bar scene, get to know some of the waiters and bartenders, then OK lah, we started to fit in. Now, at all the tapas bars and happening Irish pubs along there, even if we're not on dates and it's just us girls hanging out, we feel more OK about showing our faces in Holland Village.

Since I was the first to arrive after work, judging from all the texts from Fann and Imo about being late, I decided to slowly slowly walk to Wala Wala. Never fun sitting there for too long before your girls show up, after all. If you sit there for too long with your one drink, just waiting and looking, waiting and looking—aiyoh, even if the bartenders don't think you are pros, I tell you, someone confirm will come and sit down with you and ask "How much?"

Holland V was happening as usual for a Thursday night. Of

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course it was still a bit early—since our work shift is more normal we can knock off at five o'clock, so we can come out earlier and start our night. I know sometimes if you work for ang moh companies or those British law or banking firms, even if you are a receptionist or assistant, then still must work late. Sometimes my job at the *New Times* is also like that lah, since I'm assistant to the editor in chief and all. But luckily Albert didn't keep me too long today, because even that early on a Thursday, the narrow street that most of Holland V was on was already quite packed. The tables outside the bars and restaurants jammed on the pavement were already filled with people drinking and smoking. And I could almost taste the smell of grilled meats coming from some of the fashion-fashion yakitori places on the street.

Because it's so crowded—and sometimes filled with families and kids, that kind of crap—Holland V is not usually my favorite place to go. But it's good to check out the scene and be a part of it at least once in a while, show face and all.

When I got to Wala, I ordered their super shiok chicken wings. If the girls are late, it's their problem. More wings for me. But bang balls, man—Fann and Imo showed up just when Ahmad brought the wings to our table. Fann didn't even wait to sit down before grabbing one and stuffing it into her mouth. This one, I tell you, if I didn't know her better I would have said she confirm would end up marrying some lousy Ah Beng squatting by a longkang.

"OK, you all know there was a reason that I called this meeting," I said, making sure when I paused to stare hard at Imo. This one as usual was not paying attention, searching through her bloody handbag for god knows what.

"This is a meeting? I thought we were just drinking tonight," Imo said, finally taking out a gold Chanel compact to powder her nose. Fann signaled to Ahmad to bring a round of our usual drinks

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over. After coming here for so long, Ahmad knows lah—cheap white wine first, good stuff later, especially if by then we have met ang mohs who want to buy us rounds.

"Yes, yes—but there's something we need to talk about . . ." I started to explain. "This is serious. Listen—I think we need a plan."

Fann and Imo looked worried. I cannot blame them lah. We whole life never talk about serious things at all. Yes, when Fann's dad died and Imo—aiyoh, Imo—when all that drama happened after junior college with her father and his second family, then, yes, we were serious. So they must have thought something really bad happened.

"Eh, you OK or not?" Fann said.

"OK, OK . . . but listen, I've been thinking, we don't have much time. Look at us three—this is a happening Thursday night and the best plans we have are going out with each other. No husband, no two-carat diamond ring, not even a boyfriend. What kind of cock life is this? If we want to marry ang moh guys, we cannot go to SPG bars and just anyhow shoot arrow. No wonder we haven't win yet. We must have a method!"

Imo looked skeptical. "If we just go to Chaplin's or Hard Rock, meet people, dance dance dance, sing sing, hiau hiau a bit," she said, "aren't we just doing it because it's fun?" Fann shrugged and nodded.

"Fun—your head lah!" I said. "Like that maybe for one night or a few nights, of course it will work. But if we want to get married, then we must be more strategy! So, listen—I came up with this idea. Got four parts."

Imo leaned forward—I could tell she was a little curious. Of all of us, she's the one who's most focused on getting married. Her father—aiyoh, my god.

When we were in secondary school, we didn't see Imo's dad

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much. Uncle was always traveling for work—each week he would disappear for a few nights, often over the weekend. So every time we were at her house, it was mostly just us hanging out with Auntie. Auntie never seemed to mind though—whenever Uncle came back from his travels, he always brought something nice. Sometimes got duty-free perfume lah; other times if he disappeared for longer trips, he would actually come back with a Prada handbag, that kind of thing. But of course Imo always liked it best when he showed up with those big Toblerones—so big that each piece alone was the size of a McDonald's hamburger! The few times we met him, he seemed nice, not anything special—people's father is just people's father after all. Unless you bump into them in a club or something—my god, later on, after our school years, that actually happened with some of our friends' dads—you don't really think about them that much.

And Uncle was so boring we definitely didn't think about him at all. He was like my dad lah. Or Fann's dad, who we didn't really care about until he suddenly had a heart attack. But then right after we graduated from JC, like just the day after our final exam and we hadn't even had time to go chionging to celebrate and all, Uncle and Auntie sat Imo down after dinner and said, "We have something to tell you."

Imo said everything happened very quickly—once Uncle started talking, everything also just anyhow come out. Apparently, his job was actually not a traveling type of job. He works in a local insurance office! First, he said, Imogen, you know your Mummy and I love you very much, right? Everything you want, we also give you. (When Imo first heard this, at first she thought he was dying—at that time Fann's dad had recently passed away, so we were all quite scared, wondering which Uncle is the next to go.) So Imo just nodded and kept quiet—when she told us about it, she said she was almost crying.

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But then Uncle said, "Now that you're old enough, almost a woman already, your mummy and I thought you should know something: You have two brothers."

At first, Imo was quite confused. She didn't know what he meant. "But how could my mum have two other kids that I don't know about? Cannot be! She had me when she was so young and then I don't remember her being pregnant anymore. Where got two sons?" She was still thinking hard about all this when Uncle continued talking.

"I have another family," he said.

Imo looked across the dinner table at her mum, who was looking a bit blank-faced, except that her eyes were staring down. She said Auntie was blinking and looking hard at her fingers, which were pulling apart at one corner of the carefully ironed white tablecloth that she spent four months last year crocheting. This was the tablecloth that Auntie cared about so much that she even bought a special clear plastic cover for it for Chinese New Year so when people brought curry or whatever over, her tablecloth will still be Number One OK. So Imo knew that if her mum was actually cho cho-ing with this tablecloth—then, confirm: this conversation is really serious.

Uncle continued: "When I met your mum, I already had one son. And then just around the time you were born, I had my second son. They look a bit like you actually . . ."

Imo is usually quite toot lah. So at this point, when she told all of us about it, we thought the situation was pretty clear. But Imo was actually still confused! So she asked her dad, "But . . . you had your mistress before mum?" She still wasn't getting anything or understanding what was going on. When she told me, Sher and Fann all this—my god—we all just wanted to reach over and slap her one time. Where got people so stupid?

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That was when Uncle looked a little bit embarrassed. And she said her mum by this time couldn't even look up from the tablecloth.

"Imo, I care about your mum very much. And I care about you very much. The two sons I have are with my wife. They live here—in . . . well, a town center quite far from here so you were definitely never in the same schools of course. But now that you are all grown up, have wings, can fly already, we wanted you to know you have brothers out there. Just keep that in mind whenever you meet new people. You just . . . aiyah, you just never know. And we were thinking now that you are getting older, going out and dating dating all, sekali something weird happens. Better be safe. So we might as well sit you down and tell you everything—just in case. So, um, if you ever have any news about new guys you are meeting, might be getting serious with, you just be sure to keep us informed ah? OK, come, come, let's eat some oranges."

And then after that Imo's mum just got up, peeled two oranges for them, went to her room and turned on the TV to watch her Cantonese serial and they didn't talk about it anymore.

Walao eh! Crazy lah!

When Imo told us, at first we weren't quite sure what to say or think. We all hugged her of course. And then we just looked at each other. Finally, Sher smiled, reached over to squeeze Imo's hand and said: "Eh, Imo—you are lucky you're a sarong party girl. Like that, you confirm won't end up snogging your brother by mistake. Even if your dad's wife is white, her sons will only be half ang moh. As if you'll even think of going home with a loser like that!" Even Imo had to laugh over that one. Sher always knew just the right thing to say.

So ever since then, Imo has been quite determined: Get an ang moh husband or bust, man!

"Come, set. Tell us your strategy," Imo said. The guniang had

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even closed her mirror and put it away, so now I really knew she was listening.

"OK, number one," I said. "Looks. Obviously we are quite chio, otherwise how come we have so many ang moh guys always chasing us? But girls, think about it. If you look carefully, the types of Singaporean girls that ang moh guys like to pok and the types that they end up marrying is quite different! So we must make ourselves look like those girls they want to marry."

"But who?" Imo asked, already looking a bit lost.

Aiyoh, I tell you. I tried very hard not to roll my eyes though. Instead, I pulled out some of the pictures I looked up on my phone that morning. Best one: Maggie Cheung. "This one ah," I said, "very power. Marry the best type of guy—European! French some more; sexy sexy one. Rich also." Imo and Fann were nodding.

Actually, I was not really joking when I said that since we are so chio, why must we plan so hard? For starters, we were all quite skinny—Imo was the smallest of us, short short cute cute one. Got dimple on one side of her face so at least she looked half like the cute Japanese teenagers in those Kao Biore face soap advertisements. (But without that one big side tooth jutting out—my god. Those dentists in Japan, I also don't know how they spend their time, man. Why are their girls' teeth all so terok?) Imo's skin was also very fair—so fair that she definitely didn't need to buy SK-II whitening cream. Lucky girl. Also, right after school she worked at Robinson's at the Shiseido counter for a while, so that girl really knows how to put makeup on and all. Her eyes are always nicely outlined so they look round round, big big one, like those Japanese anime girls that guys always want to pok. And since she now works at Club 21 boutique, she gets a 40 percent discount on everything they sell, so her clothing and handbags always quite designer, quite fashion one.

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Fann, to be honest, is not so cute. Her nose is a bit big, her eyes only have a double eyelid on one side, so no matter how much she tries to put on eye makeup nicely, her face always ends up looking a bit crooked. And some more, even though since secondary school, she's always carried around a packet of powdered blotting paper wherever she goes, her skin is always oily! My god, when it's hot, like June or July type, her face—it's a bloody blooming garden! Everywhere also got pimples opening flower. But still, she's a very nice girl lah. And her job is quite serious—she opened a pet store with her uncle and all—so guys usually know she's not after them for money or something funny. I think she gets extra points for that. Also, her backside is quite round and sexy, so confirm guys will always try to rubba her in clubs. And I guess she must be quite good in bed since usually, even when they wake up the next morning, the guys always take her out for breakfast, still ask for her phone number so they can text her again type.

Me, I think I'm OK lah. Can still make it. Not as sweet as Imo but luckily, not as bad as Fann. The ang moh guys I've met are always talking about how glossy and black my long hair is and how soft and smooth my skin is—so I guess I at least have two things going for me. Of us all though, Sher was the best looking—skin very fair like a Japanese princess, eyes not as big as Imo's but beautiful almond-shape type. And she really knows how to put on eyeliner so the sides of her eyes look pulled out a bit, like those exotic Asian girls in ang moh movies. Also, she was the tallest of us all. But she wasn't the skinny giraffe type—her breasts were small but quite nice (at least got cleavage, unlike Fann or Imo), and with her small small waist and legs long long and so shapely, my god, when she wears a miniskirt she almost looks like a Barbie doll. When she walks along Orchard Road, guys always steam. Even the atas guys also not shy—they stare until crazy.

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Which is why, really, the way things turned out for Sher, it was damn bang balls to think about how everything was just so bloody wasted.

"You see ah," I continued, before the girls could get distracted, "Maggie Cheung actually, her features are not so pretty. Her teeth are so big, got gap some more, her eyes are so small, cheeks a bit fat. But still, ang moh guys love her! Because, you know why? She's quite mysterious. Joan Chen also same thing—her face flat flat also ang moh guys still steam. So we must learn—better to be mysterious a bit. When we meet a new possibility, cannot same night everything also whack."

Fann waved at Ahmad for another round of drinks and took another chicken wing—typical, never pay attention. Imo on the other hand, had taken out a little notebook and was writing things down. Good. The way her fishnet mind works, I know if she doesn't have anything written down she confirm won't remember.

"Number two—is behavior. You see ah, ang mohs in Asia, step one for them is to look for girls to pok. This one is not hard lah. SPG bars, office . . . everywhere in this country is easy for them to find girls. But once they are used to this, it's quite difficult to get them to think differently. So the best thing is to grab them FOB—if you snatch the ones who just moved here one or two weeks ago, then confirm is a win. But if you don't manage to do that, when you meet them, you must act quite differently from those girls who just want to give them one–two nights good time type. Eh, Fann, I tell you ah, if you want to get married you better stop stuffing your face and write this down." I pointed to her handbag and she fasterly opened it to pull out a pen and paper.

"OK, until now, we have been quite good at the laugh laugh drink drink wink wink type of thing. But if we want to be more serious, we must know what kind of things ang moh guys like—football,

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rugby, maybe things like rowing or tennis are also quite good. We don't know much also must learn—so every day, we'd better read the *Straits Times*. English league, Italian league, German players, World Cup—everything also must know. If we know more, then we have more chance to talk more cock. If we talk more cock, then it becomes more like a relationship! Not just one night garabing garabung then everything is over already. If they think that we like what they like, then an actual relationship more likely is can."

Even Fann was very seriously writing things down now. Imo, however, asked, "What about them learning about the things that we like?" Fann nodded. I tell you—sometimes Imo's tootness is just really number one. "Hello," I said. "If you are waiting for a guy who wants to hold your hand and have long conversations about the new Shiseido eye shadow then you'd better take off your shoes and sit down comfortably—because you are going to wait forever!" Fann started giggling; Imo just blinked at her.

"Next, we must understand the enemy. Cannot be like Jackie Chan in those kung fu movies—in the beginning he's always the goondu, everything also don't know, don't understand then alamak, suddenly his balls get whacked! No, if we want to win, then we must know who we are fighting: number one: China girls. This one is the worst one. Since they come from China and are desperate not to go back, they anything will also do. No standards at all! Old old, ugly ugly, smelly smelly also they don't care. But because they are so willing and so pretend-sweet, ang mohs like them! Some more they have no guilty conscience—if a guy has a wife, a girlfriend, is engaged, has kids, they don't care. All, they will also whack. China girls, aiyoh. This one is the number one to watch.

"Number two: Filipinas—this one is quite dangerous because they are quite ang moh already, so it's very easy for them to talk to

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ang moh guys. They have a lot in common. Some more they sing so well—if we see them in a karaoke lounge, I think we better just siam. No chance there. Better don't fight.

"Number three: other SPGs—this one is quite easy to spot in a bar lah. But girls, we are all on the same side, all looking for the same thing, so if we see them, just show respect. No need to fight unless they try to potong your catch—if they potong, then we hantam them one time.

"Number four: ang moh girls. This one is actually not so dangerous because they're all so fat and white chicken-skin type. Some more their hands and legs are usually damn hairy! If ang moh guys want that kind of thing, aiyoh, they know that if they go home there are better ones there lah. Down here in Singapore, these ang moh women know that Asian girls are better. But still, sometimes, the ang moh girls also can win. So it's just better to keep an eye on them."

At this point I was a bit hungry but Fann and Imo were so quiet I thought I'd better carry on. I was starting to feel like I was giving one of those opposition rally speeches you see on the Internet. My voice was getting louder and louder, Fann and Imo were both sitting up, leaning forward, listening carefully to each word. If I waved a flag, I tell you, they confirm will shout "Merdeka!" (At least, this is what I was thinking in my head lah.)

"Last one: This one is not hard," I said. "We should just know the places to go. We already know the bars—Hard Rock, Studemeyer's, Chaplin's, these are all good places to spot ang mohs. But we also must try and see them in normal situations—for example, ang mohs like brunch! And hello, I'm not talking about going eat roti prata or prawn noodles type of brunch. Pancakes lah, eggs lah—that kind of thing. Even if we don't really like to eat that crap, we

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must also whack brunch. Cannot just whack the bars and clubs. Sunday lunchtime—must try.

"OK? Now, we must be serious a bit. If this is what we want, then we must really understand all of this. Cannot anyhow anyhow anymore."

The two of them were very quiet and looked at each other blankly. "Jazzy," Fann finally said. "I think this plan—we cannot be like that lah. Love and relationships must be natural, not so calculative. We cannot plan plan plan until like this. Otherwise, what does it all mean? We might as well be like our parents."

My god, when she said this—this really got me upset. The whole point of my plan, of us trying so hard on all this, is exactly so we won't end up like our parents. Fann of all people should know—when her father dropped dead her mother was actually happy! No one to kau beh and fight with her for the TV when she wants to watch her Cantonese serials anymore. No one to sit on her sofa, smoking and peeling dried skin off his toes for hours each evening. Finally—after all those lousy years, peace inside her own house!

"Fann," I said, blinking hard at her. "You wake up your own head! If we don't follow this plan, we will end up like your parents, my parents or even worse—Imo's parents!" Even though I was angry, I felt bad about saying that last part lah—hello, this guniang here isn't heartless after all. But when I looked over at Imo and said, "Eh, sorry," she just shrugged.

"It's true," Imo said very softly. "We can't end up like them."

All this, I know, was a lot for Fann and Imo to think about. But you look at us—now, we are still chio, still happening. But twenty-six and twenty-seven is not young already, you know. Fann has always been a bit cannot make it lah, and Sher is a gone case already, but Imo and I still have a chance! Even then, I can already see, some-

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times when I look at our old photos, that last year and the year before that, we were even more chio. So if we carry on like this, that means next year we will be even less chio! This matter of getting an ang moh husband—if we are smart—it's best to try and fasterly settle.

"In fact," I added, "I think we actually must hurry up a bit. If you are serious about this, then, come, we set deadline. Today is Feb first—by end of month, must try and confirm something."

"Like what?" Fann asked. "You want us to be married in a month? Be engaged?" Imo joined in. "Crazy, lah!" she said. "That's only a month! I'm very busy at work, you know. Our big Club 21 sale is happening this month!"

Aiyoh, my god. These people! Hadn't they been listening to anything I said?

"Look," I said, "no one is asking you to hold a wedding banquet in thirty days. All I'm saying is, by the end of the month, we should at least have an ang moh boyfriend—a serious one. If we really focus and put our minds to it—and follow the strategy—this one, I tell you, is probably can. So how? Set?"

Imo looked at Fann, who looked back at her for a moment. "OK," Imo said, raising her glass and waving her hand at Fann to follow. Together, we clinked our glasses and said, "Set!"

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