

"A compulsively readable story with intrigue, humor, and, above all, heart." — LAURIE ELIZABETH FLYNN,
author of *The Girls Are All So Nice Here*



A NOVEL

VERA WONG'S
UNSOLICITED
ADVICE *for*
MURDERERS

JESSE Q. SUTANTO

National Bestselling Author of *Dial A for Aunties*

PRAISE FOR
FOUR AUNTIES AND A WEDDING

“Meddy Chan and her indomitable aunties are back in the hilarious *Four Aunties and a Wedding* by Jesse Q. Sutanto.”

—PopSugar

“Sutanto deftly blends preposterous humor (British slang, mafia posers) with enduring devotion to prove ‘there is no right or wrong way to ‘being Asian.’ ”

—*Booklist*

“Charming, chaotic, and sometimes ridiculous, this tale will appeal to anyone who both adores and is embarrassed by their family, which is just about everyone.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“You can’t help but get a kick out of the aunties’ outrageous stunts and their even bigger hearts. Keep your friends close and these four aunties closer.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Sutanto pushes you to the edge of your seat with this suspenseful rom-com that infuses humor and heritage.”

—*USA Today*

“There’s a kind of magic to Sutanto’s writing. . . . She tackles complicated issues of culture and family ties while also creating convoluted plotlines that’ll make you squeal with laughter.”

—*The Wellesley News*

“Heart, humor, and the mafia . . . this saga has it all!”

—*Woman’s World*

DIAL A FOR AUNTIES

“A hilarious, heartfelt romp of a novel about—what else?—accidental murder and the bond of family. . . . Utterly clever, deeply funny, and altogether charming, this book is sure to be one of the best of the year!”

—Emily Henry, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Book Lovers*

“Sutanto brilliantly infuses comedy and culture into the unpredictable rom-com/murder-mystery mashup as Meddy navigates familial duty, possible arrest, and a groomzilla. I laughed out loud and you will too.”

—*USA Today* (four-star review)

“I *loved* it. Whip-smart, original, and so funny. I found it impossible to put down and lost count of the number of times I laughed out loud.”

—Beth O’Leary, *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *The No-Show*

“It’s a high-wire act of comic timing, misunderstandings, romantic foibles, and possibly foiled heists. . . . The glue is Meddeline; endearing, capable, and in full thrall to her elders, who are all absolute hoots to keep company with.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“If you loved *Crazy Rich Asians* and all the comedic family drama, you’ll definitely get a kick out of this story.”

—PopSugar

“Part thriller, part rom-com, Jesse Q. Sutanto’s *Dial A for Aunties* will give you the good laugh we could all use these days.”

—*Marie Claire*

TITLES BY JESSE Q. SUTANTO

DIAL A FOR AUNTIES

FOUR AUNTIES AND A WEDDING

VERA WONG'S UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR MURDERERS

YOUNG ADULT AND MIDDLE GRADE

WELL, THAT WAS UNEXPECTED

THE OBSESSION

THE NEW GIRL

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JESSE Q. SUTANTO

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About the Author

To Mama, the OG Vera

ONE



VERA

Vera Wong Zhuzhu, age sixty, is a pig, but she really should have been born a rooster. We are, of course, referring to Chinese horoscopes. Vera Wong is a human woman, thank you very much, but roosters have nothing on her. Every morning, at exactly four thirty, Vera's eyelids snap open like roller shades shooting up. Then the upper half of her body levitates from the mattress—no lazy rolling out of bed for Vera, though admittedly sitting up in bed now comes with about half a dozen clicks and clacks of her joints. She swings her fuzzy-socked feet out with gusto and immediately finds the slippers she placed next to her bed with military precision the night before. She takes a quick moment to send a text to her son, reminding him that he's sleeping his life away and should have been up and at it before her. He is, after all, a young man with a whole world to conquer. Late mornings, Vera believes, are only for toddlers and Europeans.

After a quick wash, Vera dons her morning gear—a polo shirt with a Ralph Lauren logo so big that it covers her entire left breast (well, okay, thanks to the ravages of time and gravity, it covers the top half of her breast) and sweatpants. Arm sleeves are yanked on and adjusted so that there isn't an exposed sliver of skin between her

shirt sleeves and the removable ones. Many years ago, when Vera was a brazen young woman, she never checked her arm sleeves and often walked around with a tanned strip of skin around her upper arms. Those were obviously the wild days, when she lived life on the edge and took unnecessary risks.

Sleeves on, Vera nods at her reflection and marches to the kitchen, where she gulps down a pint of room-temperature water—cold water, Vera believes, would freeze the fats in your arteries and give you heart disease. At the door, Vera dons her orthopedic sneakers and her tortoiseshell sunglasses, and finally, the last and perhaps most vital article of clothing—a visor so enormous that there is no way that a single ray of freckle-causing, wrinkle-making sunlight could snake its way onto her face. Then, without a backward glance, Vera strides out into the world.

And all of this happens without the aid of alarm clocks. Vera should really have been a rooster, but she isn't; she is a pig, and perhaps that is where all the trouble began.

• • •

According to the Chinese horoscope, pigs are diligent and compassionate and are the ones to call upon when sincere advice is needed. Unfortunately, very few people call Vera for sincere advice, or even insincere advice. The one person who should be calling her at all times for advice—her son, Tilbert—never does. Vera doesn't quite understand why. When her parents were alive, she often went to them for advice, even when she didn't need to, because unlike her son, Vera was a filial child and knew that asking her parents for advice made them feel needed. Well, no matter. Vera is a diligent mother and goes out of her way to give Tilly all the advice he could ever need anyway. Her previous texts are as follows:

Sent today at 4:31 a.m.:

Tilly, are you awake? It is 4:31 AM, very late. When I was your age, I wake up at 4AM every morning to cook breakfast for Ah Gong and Ah Ma. Qi lai! Seize the day! Carpe diem! Kind regards, Mama.

Sent yesterday at 7:45 p.m.:

Tilly, I notice that this girl @NotChloeBennet has liked TWO of your videos on the TikTok! I think this means she likes you. I look at her profile and she pout a lot, but I think she will make good wife. She went with her mother for manicure last week, this means she is a filial daughter. Perhaps you should slip and slide into her DM. Kind regards, Mama.

Vera had been particularly pleased about using the phrase “slip and slide into her DM.” Vera insists on keeping up to date with every trend. She doesn’t believe in getting left behind by the younger generations. Every time she comes across a nonsensical-sounding phrase, she looks it up on the Google and jots down its meaning in her little notebook.

Sent yesterday at 5:01 p.m.:

Tilly, it is 5PM, I hope you have eaten your dinner. Your Uncle Lin eat dinner at 7PM every night and he didn’t even live past thirty. You better eat dinner now. Kind regards, Mama.

This one actually garnered a reply.

TILLY: Uncle Lin died because he was hit by a bus. And I’ve told you to stop calling me Tilly. I go by Bert.

VERA: Don't talk back to your elders. I raise you better than that. And what is wrong with Tilly? It's a good name, your Baba and I think long and hard about your name, you should treasure it.

This was followed by more silence from Tilly. But no matter. There is no time for her wayward son right now, because Vera is about to start her morning walk, and morning walks are a serious business. First, there is the stretching. Many people her age complain of stiff joints and unbending limbs, but Vera goes into a low squat without much difficulty and bends at the waist until the tips of her fingers touch her sneakers. When he was a teen, Tilly had been extremely embarrassed about Vera's stretching routine. He'd begged her to do it in the privacy of their home instead of on the sidewalk, but one needs fresh air to properly stretch, and anyway, Tilly should be proud that his mother is setting such a good example for their neighbors.

With her muscles sufficiently warmed up, Vera gets into walking position—chin up, chest out, and elbows perpendicular to her body. Then she begins to walk, her fists swinging in front of her chest with the enthusiasm of a North Korean soldier at a national parade. Vera's morning walk can only be described as vigorous. She is a general on the warpath, eating up the miles with ruthless efficiency. Anyone foolish enough to get in her way is met with a cutting glare (which is invisible behind the sunglasses and the visor), but Vera relishes having to swerve around passersby, as it is a chance for her to put her agility and quick reflexes to the test.

For her last birthday, Tilly gave her a Samsung watch that could measure her steps, but Vera sees no need for it, because she knows exactly how many steps her daily route takes: 3,112 steps, starting on Trenton and Pacific, where her house is, down along Washington, where all the mom-and-pop grocery stores and souvenir shops are preparing to open for the day. Some of the shop owners wave at Vera and call out greetings, but they all know she can't stop for a chat, not when she's on her morning walk. Still, Vera has impeccable

manners, so she calls out niceties in Mandarin like, “Wah, the melons look good, Mr. Hong!” or “The weather is finally warming up, Sister Zhao!” as she zips past.

She slows down a little in front of the café that sprouted like a particularly pustulant pimple two years ago on Washington. The owner is a rude millennial who doesn’t even live in Chinatown. Vera’s mouth twists in a sneer as she walks past, and as she always does every morning, she places a silent curse on the café. Even its name irks her. The Café. She can just imagine the kind of confusion it has caused to its customers. *Where would you like to go? The Café. Right, which one? The Café! WHICH ONE?* You’d think that with a name like that, the Café would have folded long ago. But no, in defiance of all logic, not only did it not go under, it flourished, stealing customers from the older shops in the vicinity. Often, when Vera sits in her quiet tea shop, her mind wanders to the Café and it ruins her perfectly wonderful tea. Truly, the Café and its horribly unhealthy product—coffee, ugh—are a blight on San Franciscans, nay, on humanity.

When she gets down to the Dragon Gate of Chinatown on Bush Street, she turns the corner and walks along Stockton all the way to Woh Hei Yuen, where the Tai Chi Quan group is just starting their routine. Her husband, Jinlong, came here every day up until he had his stroke. He often tried to get Vera to join him, but Vera did not see the point in tai chi. Too slow to do much good, surely. It’s about as effective as yoga, which is to say, not very. Each time after Jinlong finished with tai chi, Vera would check his pulse and he never once broke eighty. What is even the point? Still, she walks through Woh Hei Yuen and waves at the tai chi group and ignores the way her heart cracks a little when she sees that Jinlong isn’t among the slow-moving people. Silly woman, of course Jinlong isn’t here, he is safe in a silver urn in her living room, and that’s that.

First thing Vera does at the end of each walk is to press her thumb against the inside of her wrist and measure her heart rate.

Satisfied that it's at a respectable ninety-two beats per minute, Vera trudges inside, through her dark tea shop and up the stairs back to her living quarters. After an invigorating cold shower, Vera eats a well-balanced breakfast of congee, preserved duck eggs, and fermented tofu. Finally, she toddles back down and bustles about tidying up and preparing her shop.

As a teenager, Tilly delighted in pointing out the inaccuracies in the name Vera Wang's World-Famous Teahouse.

"First of all, nobody knows about it, so it's really not 'world-famous,'" he said with a roll of his eyes.

Vera tutted, but before she could answer, Jinlong said, "Not true, your mother was very well-known back in China for her teas. Many customer come from faraway places just to taste her tea."

"Mm-hmm," Tilly said, clearly unconvinced. He quickly moved on to his next attack. "And why is it called Vera *Wang*? You're Vera *Wong*."

"Ah," Jinlong said with an admiring glance at Vera. "That's because your mother is very smart lady, very savvy. Vera Wang is very famous person, even white people know her name. So your mother said we might as well name it after her."

"That's called misrepresentation, Baba," Tilly snapped. "You guys could get sued!" Then he added, very spitefully, Vera thought, "If anyone knew about this teahouse, that is. But I guess since nobody knows of its existence, it doesn't matter."

Jinlong only laughed and patted Tilly on the back. "Oh, er zi, you are so full of knowledge about the law. Maybe you go to law school, eh?"

Things were so much easier back then, when Jinlong was around to act as a buffer between Vera and Tilly. After Jinlong's death, the relationship between mother and son had sagged slowly but inevitably into almost nothing. Tilly did indeed go to law school. Tilly is now a junior associate at a fancy law firm near the Embarcadero, with offices so high up that you can see the car lights twinkling on

the Bay Bridge at night. Not that Vera would know; it's not like Tilly ever invites her to his office, but she likes to imagine what Tilly sees when he gazes out of his office window.

Stop thinking about Tilly, Vera scolds herself as she lifts the last chair from the table and sets it on the floor. She goes to the front door and flips the sign from CLOSED to OPEN, then she walks behind the counter, perches on her stool, and awaits her customers.

Vera Wang's World-Famous Teahouse is open for business.