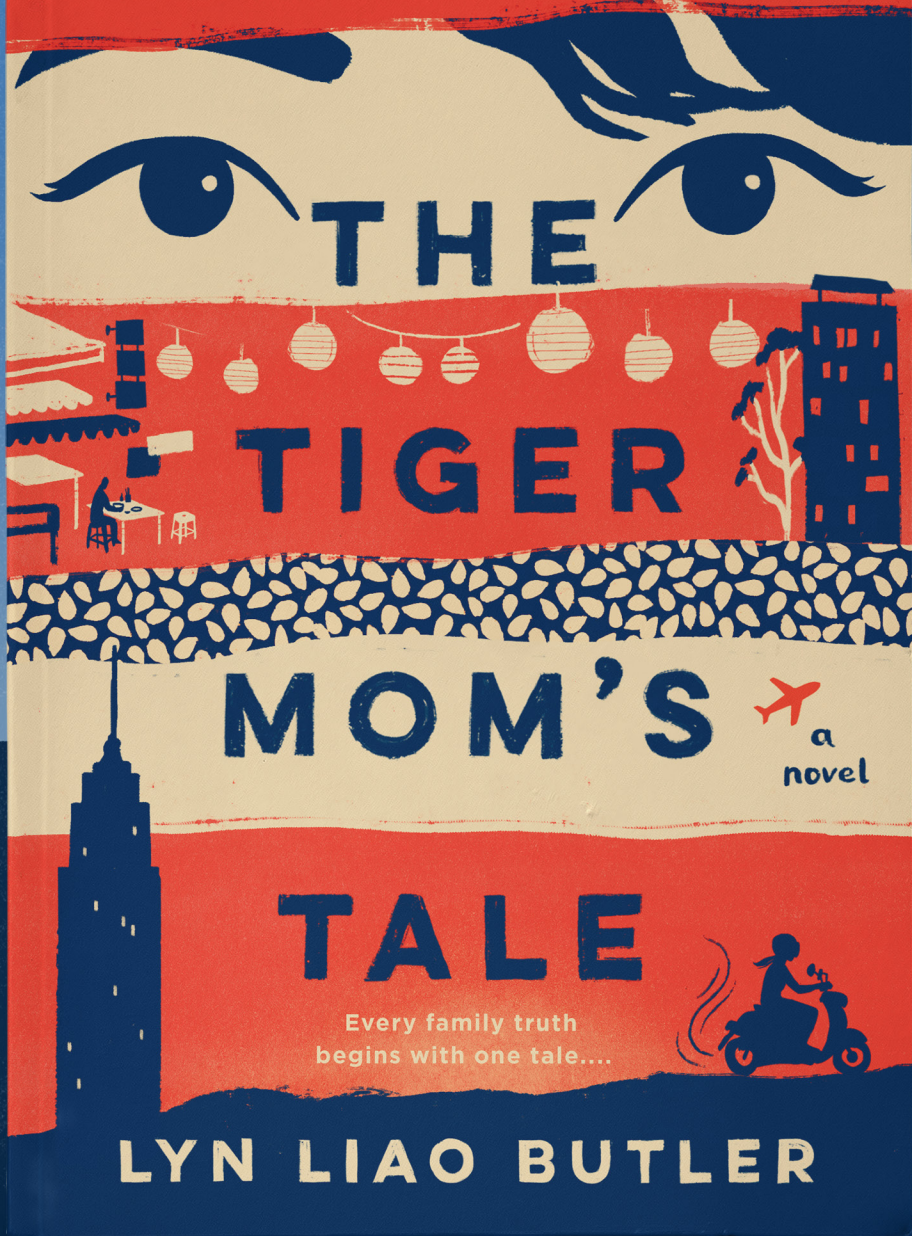


"A heartfelt, delightful read."—CHARLES YU, author of *Interior Chinatown*, winner of the National Book Award for Fiction



BOOK CLUB KIT

A
Conversation
with
**LYN
LIAO
BUTLER**



This is your debut novel. Congratulations! What compelled you to write this particular story?

I was born in Taiwan, but moved to the States when I was seven and was brought up here. I've always felt more American than Taiwanese, but because I look Asian on the outside, people assumed I'm more Asian. That pull between cultures always had me wondering who I really was—the good Taiwanese daughter who got good grades and excelled at piano and dance and did what my parents told me (no dating, parties, and other strict Taiwanese ideas), or the American one who wanted to try new things and break out? That's where the story for *The Tiger Mom's Tale* came from. What would it feel like to look Asian on the outside but be brought up by an American family?

Pick three words to describe *The Tiger Mom's Tale*.

Multicultural, food, family.

How would you describe Lexa's journey in the novel?

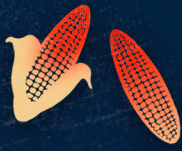
She needed to reconcile the two halves of her heritage. Because of a trauma from when she was fourteen, she ran away from her Taiwanese side. But that has made her afraid to open her heart to love and closed her off from knowing more about her Taiwanese heritage. In order to find out who she really is, she had to let go of the past and be willing to find out more about her Taiwanese heritage and family.

The importance of family is central to the themes of this book. What do you hope readers take away from this story in regards to what family means?

Family is very important in the Taiwanese culture. Every family is different, some culturally diverse, but that doesn't make it any less of a family. I hope readers will see that Lexa had to be willing to open her heart to embrace her Taiwanese family, as well as her American one. They are equally important and each is unique and also messy in its own way.

Are any of the characters in the novel inspired by people you know personally?

Well, Lexa is inspired by me only because she is a personal trainer like me, was single into her mid-thirties, and is Taiwanese but feels more American (although I am full Taiwanese while Lexa is half-Taiwanese). But other than that, her



Taiwanese STREET CORN RECIPE

Every street fair has its own version of grilled corn, but the Taiwanese version is the one that gets my taste buds salivating (there I go drooling again). I can smell a Taiwanese grilled corn from streets away and can lead you right to the corn stand.

I figured out how to make it and have served it to many happy friends and family. I use soy sauce paste and a chili garlic sauce. You can find these in any Asian grocery.

1. Mix together soy sauce paste and chili garlic sauce in a bowl. (How much you use depends on how many ears of corn you are grilling and how spicy you like it.)
2. Brush the marinade on the shucked corn directly on the grill and rotate every few minutes so all sides get cooked. You can brush on a second coat if you like it more flavorful.
3. Grill corn until slightly charred. Remove from heat to cool slightly and voilà—my version of a Taiwanese street food!

story has nothing to do with me. Hsu-Ling was inspired by a little girl who was in the same orphanage as my son. She was adopted at the same time we adopted my son and we have stayed close to her family. She was born missing part of a leg like Hsu-Ling, and she has the same spunky energy that Hsu-Ling has. Other than that, the rest of the characters are made up.

Is there a character who was particularly enjoyable or challenging to write?

I loved writing Pin-Yen and trying to get into her mind to see why she would do to Lexa what she did. She loved her daughter so much and wanted only the best for her that she had blinders on and didn't see how she was hurting anyone else. I actually wrote her a little too evil and my editor, Cindy Hwang, had me write in an extra scene to humanize her so that readers could understand why Pin-Yen did what she did.

What advice do you give to someone who feels caught between two cultures and doesn't know where they belong?

Explore both cultures as much as you can. It took me a long time before I felt comfortable owning my Taiwanese side, where I didn't feel like I had to hide my American side from my parents. It's so hard to be stuck between two completely different cultures where different "rules" apply, and people from one side don't necessarily understand the rules from the other side. But in order to reconcile both sides, I had to own up to both, to fully embrace that I am Taiwanese as well as American. I eat a lot of foods that Americans might find disgusting, but I love them so much and finally realized there was nothing wrong with it. I used to get made fun of when I was younger because of this, and in college, I would hide my collection of Taiwanese or Asian food. I learned to not be ashamed of my ambitions or American pursuits and not have to hide them from my parents. They may not understand why I do some of the things I do, but in the end, they are my parents and love me no matter what, and I think they have come to understand that we are not in Taiwan anymore, and we dress different here, or date, go out late at night, or just do things differently.

READING GROUP

Guide

1. Lexa tells Maddie at the beginning of the book that Greg is her real father because he's the one who raised her. Do you agree? Or do you think blood and biology makes someone the real parent?
2. Lexa struggles to fit in. She feels like she sticks out in her all-blond family, but when she's in Taiwan, people tell her she isn't really Taiwanese, since she's half-white. Have you ever felt that you don't fit in because of your background?
3. Taiwanese food is mentioned throughout the book. Do the descriptions make you want to try it, if you're not already familiar with it?
4. Do you think Pong's method to try to reconcile Lexa with her father was cowardly and manipulative? Or do you think he did the right thing? Would you have agreed to his conditions?
5. Lexa equates sesame balls with bad luck after her mother tells her about Phoenix and her father dies. Have you ever associated things with bad luck because you were using/doing something when you got bad news?
6. Do you think Lexa's estranged relationship with her father is why she is still single and doesn't want children? Why or why not?
7. Susan thinks Lexa has buried herself in her work to avoid dealing with her past. Do you agree? Have you ever used work to ignore emotional feelings?
8. Maddie made it clear she didn't like Hsu-Ling even before meeting her. Why do you think she was so jealous of Hsu-Ling?
9. Was Pin-Yen a sympathetic character at all? Can you understand how someone could do something like what she did to Lexa, all to protect her own daughter?
10. Lexa is reluctant to let Jake in because they live on opposite coasts and differ in their views on having children. Do you think she really feels that way, or is it just an excuse? Do you think Lexa and Jake can overcome their differences and have a healthy relationship?
11. Lexa finds solace and strength in Kung Fu, relying on it throughout her life when dealing with difficult situations and people. Do you have something similar in your own life that helps you get through difficult times?