

# 'Sushi for Beginners'

By Marian Keyes

## Chapter One

At *Femme* magazine, something had been in the air for weeks, a feeling that they were living on a fault line. Speculation finally burst into flames when it was confirmed that Calvin Carter, the U.S. managing director, had been sighted roaming around the top floor, looking for the gents' Apparently he'd just arrived in London from the head office in New York.

It's happening. Lisa clenched her fists in excitement. It's actually finally, bloody happening.

Later that day the phone call came. Would Lisa pop upstairs to see Calvin Carter and British managing director Barry Hollingsworth?

Lisa slammed down the phone. "Too right I would," she shouted at it.

Her colleagues barely looked up. People slamming phones down then shouting were ten a penny in the magazine game. Besides, they were trapped in Deadline Hell — if they didn't get this month's issue put to bed by nightfall, they'd miss their slot with the printers and would be scooped once again by archrivals *Marie Claire*. But what did she care, Lisa thought, hobbling to the lift, she wouldn't have a job here after today. She'd have a much better one somewhere else.

Lisa was kept waiting outside the boardroom for twenty-five minutes. After all, Barry and Calvin were very important men.

"Should we let her in yet?" Barry asked Calvin, when he felt they'd killed enough time.

"It's only twenty minutes since we called her," Calvin pointed out, huffily. Obviously Barry Hollingsworth didn't realize just how important he, Calvin Carter, was.

"Sorry, I thought it was later. Perhaps you'd show me again how to improve my swing."

"Sure. Now, head down and hold still. Hold still! Feet steady, left arm straight, and swing!"

When Lisa was finally granted admission, Barry and Calvin were seated behind a walnut table approximately a kilometer long. They looked frowningly powerful.

"Sit down, Lisa." Calvin Carter inclined his silver bullet head graciously.

Lisa sat. She smoothed back her caramel-colored hair, showing her free honey-colored highlights to their best advantage. Free because she kept plugging the salon in the "Ones to Watch" section of the magazine.

Settling herself in the chair, she tucked her Patrick Cox-shod feet neatly around each other.

The shoes were a size too small — no matter how many times she asked the Patrick Cox press office to send a size six, they always sent a five. But free Patrick Cox shoes were free Patrick Cox shoes. What did an unimportant detail like excruciating agony matter?

"Thank you for coming up." Calvin smiled. Lisa decided she'd better smile back. Smiles were a commodity like everything else, only given in exchange for something useful, but she reckoned in this case it was worth her while. After all, it wasn't every day that a girl was seconded to New York and made deputy editor of Manhattan magazine. So she curled her mouth and bared her pearly-white teeth. (Kept that way from the year's supply of Rembrandt toothpaste that had been donated for a reader competition, but which Lisa had thought would be more appreciated in her own bathroom.)

"You've been at *Femme* for" — Calvin looked at the stapled pages in front of him — "four years?"

"Four years next month," Lisa murmured, with an expertly judged mix of deference and confidence.

"And you've been editor for nearly two years?"

"Two wonderful years," Lisa confirmed, fighting back the urge to stick her fingers down her throat and gag.

"And you're only twenty-nine," Calvin marveled. "Wen, as you know, here at Randolph Media we reward hard work."

Lisa twinkled prettily at this patent lie. Like many companies in the Western world, Randolph Media rewarded hard work with poor pay, increasing workloads, demotions, and on-a-second's-notice redundancies.

But Lisa was different. She'd paid her dues at *Femme*, and made sacrifices that even she'd never intended to make: starting at seven-thirty most mornings, doing twelve-, thirteen-, fourteen-hour days, then going to evening press do's when she finally switched off her computer. Often she came to work on Saturdays, Sundays, even bank-holiday Mondays. The porters loathed her because it meant that whenever she wanted to come to the office one of them had to come in and open up and thereby forgo their Saturday football or their bank-holiday family outing to Brent Cross.

"We have a vacancy at Randolph Media," Calvin said importantly. "it would be a wonderful challenge, Lisa."

I know, she thought irritably. Just cut to the chase.

"It will involve moving overseas, which can sometimes be a problem for one's partner."

"I'm single." Lisa was brusque.

Barry wrinkled his forehead in surprise and thought of the termer he'd had to hand over for someone's wedding present a few years before. He could have sworn it was for Lisa here, but maybe not, perhaps he wasn't as on the ball as he once used to be ...

"We're looking for an editor for a new magazine," Calvin went on.

A new magazine? Lisa was jotted off course. But Manhattan has been published for seventy years.

While she was still grappling with the implications of that, Calvin delivered the whammy. "It would involve your relocating to Dublin."

The shock set up a smothered buzzing in her head, as if her ears needed to pop. A numb, fuzzy sensation of alienation. The only reality was the sudden agony of her crumpled toes.

"Dublin?" She heard her muffled voice ask. Perhaps ... perhaps ... perhaps they meant Dublin, New York.

"Dublin, Ireland," Calvin Carter said, down a long, echoey tunnel, destroying the last of her hope.

I can't believe this is happening to me.

"Ireland?"

"Small wet place across the Irish Sea," Barry offered kindly.

"Where they drink a lot?" Lisa said faintly.

"And they never stop talking. That's the place. Booming economy, huge population of young folk. Market research indicates the place is ripe for a new feisty women's magazine. And we want you to set it up for us, Lisa."