

## Excerpts from *Reunion: A Revenge Comedy*

Suzette Mayr

*Le corps âgé féminin est le pivot textuel de la fiction de Suzette Mayr qui s'intitule : Reunion: A Revenge Comedy. Ming, récemment réaffectée, simple employée qui se déplace en autobus au milieu de complets vestons vers le centre-ville, jure qu'elle aussi un jour prendra le bus avec des rouleaux dans ses cheveux bleuis par un shampooing colorant. L'histoire bifurque vers Johannes qui, malgré son dégoût, a du désir pour sa vieille voisine d'à côté. Elle lui cuisine des biscuits et lui offre du sherry coûteux, tandis qu'il bavarde interminablement, repoussant son corps auquel il lance des regards furtifs en utilisant des termes comme « seins flétris pendouillants » et « ventre affaissé. » Johannes se convainc lui-même que son désir sera un honneur pour la vieille dame et le fait de reléguer sa voisine dans cette gentille coterie des grands-mères le conduira ultimement à sa perte, car si ce n'était pour son jeune corps robuste, pourquoi la vieille Sissy serait-elle si prévenante à son égard?*

### MING

Ming sits on the slippery blue bus seat. The windows coated with sprays of mud, in her head a mental list of baby things to buy now that she's become her sister's grossly underpaid, unofficial nanny. Not that she doesn't love her nephew Liam, but she's not his mother for crying out loud. She's not even Liam's father.

She makes room for the suit with the moustache to sit beside her even though he must have seen her bag on the seat. She entertains the idea of asking him for a job. All suits own companies. On the other hand, why's he taking the bus unless he's just some loser employee who can't afford to drive a car? But his coat is expensive. She takes a peep at his shoes – highly polished, very nice. Maybe he's slumming or something.

A noisy crew of school kids with backwards baseball caps and still-wet hair and bare midribs in the middle of winter push the suit against Ming. Piss her off. Their backpacks remind her of her own backpack when she was little. Full of fossilized oranges because Ming's mother Shirley always

put an orange in Ming's lunch and Ming hated oranges so much she'd let them turn into orange baseballs. Which she also did back when she had her own fridge if there were oranges in her fridge for some reason like her ex-girlfriend, the six-foot allergic-to-nuts poet bought them and left them there. Seems like she hasn't had her own fridge for ages now. She had a great fridge in Montréal, one of those 1950s ones that they outlawed because little kids kept locking themselves into them and suffocating to death and then the suit wrecks her walk down memory lane by putting his stupid suit hand on her ass like it's an accident or something and she's so fucking furious she wrenches his hand out from where it's been working its way to her asshole and she holds his hand up in the air and says out loud so that all the other crummy suits can hear and the teenage kids can hear: **WHOSE HAND IS THIS? THIS IS NOT MY HAND BUT IT WAS GRABBING MY ASS.**

And so some stupid jerk ruins her morning, ruins her week, ruins her month and probably the rest of her life. Not that it wasn't ruined anyway what with no job in sight and complete stranger perverts in expensive shoes molesting her on the bus. She expects maybe applause after her announcement, but instead at the next bus stop, long before downtown where the suits live, the bus empties and she is the only one left on the bus because even the driver has left, ostensibly to 'grab a coffee' even though the bus is five minutes late. Her ass gets grabbed, but she's the crazy one, the loopy one.

The world should go fuck itself. But of course it'll fuck her over first.

She feels like shit even after she's gone to the mall and picked up Liam's prescription and the other Liam odds & ends. Back on the bus, it's the much calmer raisin set with their white, stiff, curly hair-do's and plastic rain-bonnets going wherever it is they go. The Kerby Centre? the central library? bingo? the bar? Some have curlers on under their hair-nets: she thinks these ones are the cutest. Nothing more comforting than a woman in her curlers on the bus. Ming swears that she will do this too one day, the day she becomes a grown-up.

## **JOHANNES**

Johannes believes the old lady next door is some kind of mafioso matriarch and slurps up too much of her spaghetti taking notes in his head: the black clothes, the tomato sauce, the subtle accent. He doesn't ask her who the men were who drew up in front of her house in the expensive black car

– he saw the bulges in their suit jackets.

Oh you're the hungry one, says the old lady. Have some more.

Sissy the old lady hardly eats any herself, but he doesn't notice. She will eat after he leaves, the sight of him eating makes her sick to her stomach. She sticks mostly to drinking her glass of rye.

More wine, Sissy says.

Thank you.

And he drinks her wine and she puts out bottle after bottle, and he doesn't show a single sign of getting drunk, just looks around her house and she can tell that he's just a good-looking, not very bright alcoholic.

You should have been a model, she says.

I tried, but they said I'd have to get my ears pinned back. Forget that, he says, and he sprinkles more fresh romano cheese on his pasta.

Oh them, she says. You're a writer, Johannes, she says. Forces herself to say as though she's interested, fascinated.

Yes, I'm working on a novel, but that's on hold for now, I'm working on some screenplays. I've written a lot of screenplays. I've had some interest from a producer I worked for in Saskatoon.

And what is it you do to support yourself?

He clears his throat, the Adam's apple prominent in his thick, muscly neck.

I do commercials. Want to watch a video I made?

Any commercials I might have seen?

And she sits through a loud music video which she can hardly watch because she is too busy trying to watch him without letting him know.

She's in love with me, he thinks. Poor old biddy. Probably hasn't had sex since 1906.

She's a poor, lonely old biddy, he tells his wife Jennifer when he goes home.

You're drunk at three in the afternoon? Why aren't you working? Have you done *any* work today? Have you made any phone calls?

Jesus Christ, I just finished that stupid commercial.

A month ago. You're going to have to do better than that.

And he refuses to say what he's thinking, because you can't say that kind of thing to a woman, and any man who would is an asshole.

Are you having an affair with her? asks Jennifer recklessly, ridiculously, and he laughs and laughs because he is drunk and the thought of him servicing a poor old biddy like Sissy suddenly makes his penis very hard.

Having sex with biddy?

Pendulous, withered breasts.

Grey pubic hair.

A saggy belly (he could see it under the black cloth of her dress, poking out under the belt cinched around her waist).

And her hips. He can't even begin to imagine her hips, but trying to imagine her hips, trying to imagine what her naked ass looks like makes his head hot.

No. No way. But wouldn't that be a nice gift, letting her sleep with him.

And he's a little surprised at Jennifer being so angry, he thought she'd think it was funny, him drinking all afternoon with the little old lady next door. He wonders why she isn't laughing when he can hardly stop giggling because he really has been working, doing research for his screenplay on a mafia heist gone wrong: her nephews Guiseppe, Gianni, and Fillippo. The house where she grew up in Sicily. The slipper bread she served him with oil and vinegar in a little dish. All the cheese, cheese he'd never even heard of but which he ate and ate and ate. He was soaking up the atmosphere, delirious with his good luck that he's hit on a *real* mafia family, and maybe one day he'd get to meet the nephews, get in good with them, get the goods while he got in good.

You know, I doubt the mafia's really like this, Jennifer says when she reads his second screenplay, *Lucky Stiff*. This is just stuff the guy who wrote *The Godfather* made up. John Gotti and those guys aren't like this. He's a thug and a murderer.

What do you know, Johannes says, and just takes it back from her. She didn't read it carefully, she took forever to get around to reading it, and then she did a half-ass job.

This is brilliant! gushes his girlfriend Lai Foon. This is just like *The Godfather*, only better!

You mean it?

Do I ever mean it. I wouldn't lie.

Thanks sweetie, thanks. I'm glad you like it.

And when Lai Foon tries to guide his hand away from the screenplay and on to her body where it belongs, he says, Do you have a pen I could borrow? and she heaves herself up off the couch to get him a pen and he starts writing notes in the margins of the screenplay, inspired. No time for sex now. He imagines putting his tongue in the wizened indent between Sissy's collar-bones. He's never seen any of her skin except for the skin on

her head and her hands. How he would love to see one of her elbows.

Lai Foon's super-pregnant libido wails because her husband Dougall will be home soon and she needs sex *now* and she took the afternoon off from work just to see Johannes. If Lai Foon wanted to watch a man write, she'd follow Dougall to work at the university and sit on his lap. She prays the baby inside her has nothing to do with Johannes. Johannes is a selfish moron. She would like to name the baby Rudy, after Rudolph Valentino.

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Johannes will offer himself as a gift to Sissy. Sissy will be so grateful to him, poor old biddy. He will use it for material in the novel he plans to write. Perhaps she will let him take photographs of her naked.

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Sissy pours milk into her coffee, milk from the very small porcelain jug into the black coffee and the coffee and the milk swirl around in her cup – tiny whirlwinds that grow and grow. In her cup she sees the eye of the hurricane.

Johannes talks across from her. He talks across from her. He always talks and talks across from her and really she would prefer to meditate over the tiny catastrophe in her cup, settle into the soothing walls of the restaurant with the wood-trim and the art-deco stained-glass in the windows.

She hasn't been out to a restaurant in so long. Hopefully no one will recognize her.

Today she's wearing a high collar again, but there's a V in the front of it and he can't understand why she always has to dress like a *priest*. The fact that he can't see her skin drives him crazy, all he wants is a flash of thigh, the outline of a real breast instead of the armoured bra she wears all the time. He drops his napkin on the floor.

All he wants, is to touch her.

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Johannes eats the cookies nervously, why should he be nervous, it's not like Sissy would say no. She'd more likely get down on her knees in thanks and disbelief. He gulps down more of the sweet sherry. He will do this for her, he will save her from her lonely life, and then he will go to L.A. and be a famous screen-writer. He will be on her mind forever.

And before Sissy knows it, Johannes has finished eating all the cookies,

every single one of the cookies on the plate without offering her one, like she is his doting grandmother or something who wouldn't also like a cookie, and he's drunk all the sherry, helped himself to the bottle like sherry grows on trees, and she suddenly gets very tired of being the doting little old lady grandmother, she gets tired of it and remembers why she put up with him in the first place, the thick meat around his shoulders, the huge column of neck, the wide-spaced eyes, the thick, thick fingers, the wide, muscled thighs and as he stands up to go, she doesn't listen to what he's saying, just more patronizing, say goodbye to the old lady, lie her back down in her coffin nonsense. She rips off the collar chafing her neck, she likes the feel of her neck free of her great-grandmother's fussy, scratchy, unforgiving lace, and she lunges at the backs of his knees, grabs at the tendons with her teeth and her fingers and he falls forward onto his football injured knees, shouts in pain first from the shock of her teeth on the tendons on the backs of his knees, then from the shooting in his knees as he falls to the beautiful, unforgiving floor – Jennifer, Lai Foon, they tenderly kissed the backs of those knees before they made their way up to his cock – then he is silent because she has her pit-bull teeth lodged in his very thick neck and his voice has fluttered away from his throat along with his startled spirit.

This is not how he would have chosen to die. If anyone had offered him various choices, he would have laughed, because he, he was never going to die, but if he had to choose, why a gun of course. Fast and simple and dramatic for the survivors, not messy like this, not humiliating like this. Chewed and swallowed by an old-lady werewolf.

She will lay out his sucked clean fingernails, like so many fish scales, on the polished wood of her dining room table, read the follicles in the blond swatch of hair and not find very much. Really he didn't do much, after all. Young men. Stupid, self-involved young men. Nothing useful except a lot of meat.

Johannes's mother Forrest waits for him in "Up and Away," the lounge at the airport. She sips her cool and delicious white wine spritzer, gazes contentedly at the television. Soon she will have another white wine spritzer, then another and another, then straight white wine, then a whiskey with ice, then whiskey straight.

She will find a taxi, the plane tickets to L.A. still in her bag, the plane long gone, and she will put on her sleep mask, put in her ear plugs, and lie in her bed and not sleep, just ride the spin of the bed. The phone will

ring and she won't answer, she doesn't care if it's Johannes because once again he's let her down, her son the coward, the disappointment, what did she do to have such a son, she should have had more children, or no, she shouldn't have had children, she never wanted children, it was her husband Arnold, King Moron, who wanted children. Wanted a beautiful blond baby boy. Wanted a whole football team of them.