

"A delightfully eccentric look at life in a popular-culture saturated world ... Cho displays a fine eye for the camp and outrageous."

—THE AUSTRALIAN



LOOK WHO'S MORPHING
TOM CHO

Look Who's Morphing

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This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance of characters to persons either living or deceased is purely coincidental.

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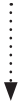
This book is dedicated to the memory of my father.

CONTENTS



- 9 *Dirty Dancing*
- 15 *Suitmation*
- 19 *The Exorcist*
- 25 *Dinner with My Brother*
- 27 *Dinner with My Grandmother*
- 31 *Dinner with Auntie Ling and Uncle Wang*
- 35 *The Sound of Music*
- 41 *Learning English*
- 43 *Today on Dr. Phil*
- 49 *Chinese Whispers*
- 53 *A Counting Rhyme*
- 55 *The Bodyguard*
- 63 *AIYO!!! An Evil Group of Ninjas is Entering and
Destroying a Call Centre!!!*
- 65 *I, Robot*
- 73 *My Life in China*
- 75 *Pinocchio*
- 85 *Look Who's Morphing*
- 97 *Cock Rock*
- 125 *Acknowledgments*

DIRTY DANCING



This is the summer of 1963 and everybody is calling me “Baby.” I am at a resort with my Auntie Feng and Uncle Stan for a holiday. The resort is on a small island that is located ten miles off the coast of North Devon where the Atlantic meets the Bristol Channel. My auntie and uncle think the resort is very exciting and they soon get involved in all the resort activities—golf, macramé, etc. Me, I think the only moderately interesting thing about the resort is Johnny Castle. Johnny is a dance instructor at the resort and he has a very nice body. As it turns out, Johnny ends up teaching me the mambo in preparation for a dance performance together and so we start spending a lot of time with one another. In fact, one night, Johnny and I find ourselves alone in his cabin. At first, we are just talking about our favourite ’80s television shows and pop songs. But there is something in the way that discussions about popular culture can bring people together and hence our conversation soon leads to Johnny and me having sex. The thing is, while Johnny looks very nice and all, I do not really feel very “in the moment.” In fact, as Johnny is panting and thrusting, I feel very detached from the experience. It is like I am a bystander, looking on as someone else is having sex with Johnny. And that someone else is a Caucasian man with a moustache. This man is tall and very well-built. He is wearing a leather cap and leather chaps. His name? Bruce. As Bruce

LOOK WHO'S MORPHING

reaches for Johnny's wrists, I take the opportunity to watch him. I find myself admiring the sheer physical power of Bruce's masculinity. And Bruce is so confident when it comes to sex. He doesn't say anything; he just pushes Johnny's face into the pillow. In the end, I watch as Bruce and Johnny spend all night having the hottest sex you can imagine.

The next morning, Bruce and Johnny get out of bed. They are feeling tired from a lack of sleep from the night before, but they are also pleased about the sex that they have had and the fact that they have gotten together. They hope that everyone else is going to be pleased that they are now a couple. But it turns out that Auntie Feng is not pleased about them being together at all and I look on as she forbids Bruce from seeing Johnny. Auntie Feng tells Bruce that he and Johnny need to have a relationship that is more like the one she has with Uncle Stan. Uncle Stan first met Auntie Feng when he went on a business trip to Shanghai in 1968. Uncle Stan then brought Auntie Feng over to Australia to be his wife. Theirs is a marriage of convenience. She has a type of green algae growing on her and he has a rare type of fungus growing on him, such that her green algae receives water and nutrient salts from his fungus, and in turn his fungus gains nutrients synthesised from her green algae. Bruce tells Auntie Feng that he could never have a relationship as perfect as the one she and Uncle Stan have, but Auntie Feng still refuses to give him and Johnny her approval. Thus, over the next few days, things are not looking so good for Bruce and Johnny. But, a few nights later in Johnny's cabin, there is a breakthrough. Bruce is right in the middle of having sex with Johnny when he discovers that Johnny has a special kind

Dirty Dancing

of intracellular methane-oxidizing bacteria in his hair and Bruce's own body produces a particular kind of enzyme, such that Johnny's bacteria is able to convert methane to a form that Bruce can use for nutrition, and in turn Bruce's enzyme protects Johnny from the harmful hydrogen peroxide that is a byproduct of Johnny's sulphur metabolizing process. So Bruce and Johnny talk over the situation with me and then the three of us go to see Auntie Feng, and Bruce and Johnny show her Johnny's bacteria and Bruce's enzyme, and then I watch as Johnny says to Auntie Feng "No one puts Baby in a corner," and he performs a big raunchy dance number with Bruce after he says it and everyone else at the resort joins in and starts dancing in a raunchy way too.

Auntie Feng has no comeback for all of this. As a result, she has no choice but to give Johnny and Bruce her blessing.

After the resort's end-of-season show, my holiday comes to a close. On my last morning at the resort, I wake up early to pack my luggage and then I run over to Johnny's cabin. I watch as Bruce and Johnny load their belongings into Johnny's black Chevy. After the car is loaded and ready to go, Bruce and Johnny turn to me to say goodbye. Johnny gives me a hug and he whispers, "I'll see ya." He gets into the Chevy and starts the engine. Bruce and I turn to each other. We do not say anything for a moment. I say, "I guess we surprised everybody." He smiles at me and says, "I guess we did." As we embrace, I feel his muscular body against me. We promise that we will keep in touch. Bruce then gets into the Chevy, and I stand and watch as the Chevy disappears into the distance. Eventually, I turn

LOOK WHO'S MORPHING

away from the road. I begin walking back to my cabin where I know Auntie Feng and Uncle Stan are waiting for me. Soon, Auntie Feng and Uncle Stan will be heading back to their home in Hobart. Me, I am due to catch a plane back to Melbourne.

My parents meet me at Melbourne Airport. They are very happy to see me. As always, they literally pass me around like I am a baby. My mother holds me in her arms and exclaims over my fingers and toes and then she passes me to my father. As my father cradles me, he starts cooing to me in baby-talk. He says to me, “What’s your name, hmmm? What’s your name? Can you say your name?” and then he tickles my foot. Given the fact that I am known as “Baby,” none of this is surprising. Furthermore, my parents have been treating me like this for years and I have never felt that it will ever change. But, this time, it annoys me more than usual. I take a deep breath and I tell my parents that I am not a baby. But my mother only pokes at my belly button and tells me that I am a little Buddha. My father then holds me up in the air and proclaims that I will grow up to be prosperous and successful. I am unsure about what to do. The placating part of me tells me to keep the peace and go along with everything, the logical part of me tells me that being prosperous and successful would be very nice, the fearful part of me tells me that I need to be held by my father, and the newer part of me—the part that learned dancing at the resort—tells me that dancing, like pop culture discussions, brings people together. In the end, the part of me that learned dancing at the resort wins out, and so I jump out of my father’s arms and I say to my parents, “No one puts Baby in a corner,”

Dirty Dancing

and I perform a big raunchy dance number after I say it and everyone else at the airport joins in and starts dancing in a raunchy way too.

My parents have no comeback for all of this. As a result, they have no choice but to come to terms with the fact that I am an adult.

SUITMATION



Suitmation is a special-effects technique that involves the use of an actor in a costumed suit.

The most famous examples of suitmation are in the *Godzilla* films. Over the years, various suitmation actors have played Godzilla.

The early days of suitmation were difficult for suitmation actors. The suits, which were typically made of foam latex, were heavy and uncomfortable. Haruo Nakajima, who played Godzilla until 1973, lost twenty kilograms during the filming of the original 1954 *Godzilla* film.

These days, the suits are much more comfortable, and are more likely to depict humans than monsters. They are also far more realistic and much cheaper to produce. All of this has allowed suitmation to move beyond film-making and within the reach of the everyday consumer.

As a result, suitmation has changed our society. Most of the people I know own at least one suitmation suit. Furthermore, most of these people wear a suitmation suit every day.

My brother Hank bought me my first suit when I was fifteen. I had always been a big Suzi Quatro fan so I ended up getting a Suzi Quatro suit.

We took the suit home. I wanted to try it on straight away so I took the suit out of its wrapping. It included Suzi's classic

LOOK WHO'S MORPHING

leather jumpsuit and snakeskin platform boots. The headpiece also perfectly replicated Suzi's face and hairstyle from 1973.

I closed my eyes and smelled the black leather. At that point, I couldn't wait any longer so I stepped into my Suzi Quatro suit and pulled it over my body. Hank helped me with the headpiece and he showed me how to zip the whole suit up. We walked to my mother's bedroom where there was a full-length mirror. I went over to the mirror, looked at myself, and felt elated to see that Suzi Quatro was staring back at me elatedly.

My Uncle Wang's favourite suit is his Tony Danza suit. Everyone says that he looks exactly like Tony Danza. In fact, Uncle Wang once confided to me that he likes to look at himself in his bathroom mirror and say to his reflection: "Hey! Aren't you that guy who was in that show *Who's the Boss?*"

Even my mother owns a suit. I remember visiting her on Christmas Day five years ago. I strutted up to her house in my Suzi Quatro suit and rang the doorbell. She opened her front door and there was Olivia Newton-John.

As much as I like suitmation, I have come to realize that I have mixed feelings about its popularity. These days, everyone wears suits; everyone is a celebrity.

As a result, I don't know who my friends are any more. They are all movie stars and pop stars. And then there is the situation with my mother. She has been a lot happier since she became Olivia Newton-John. In fact, she recently started telling all of her friends that Olivia Newton-John has a timeless appeal. My mother and I have never been that close and now

Suitmation

I wonder whether we ever will be. I have this feeling that she will be Olivia Newton-John for the rest of her life.

I have one more thing to say, and that is that something awful happened last week:

My Auntie Wei's hot bread shop was robbed. Auntie Wei had set up the shop in the suburb of Footscray over twenty years ago. She has always loved her shop and had never been robbed until last week.

The shop was robbed just after the lunchtime rush, when the very last pork bun had been sold. The two perpetrators looked just like Daniel and Mr Miyagi from the first three *Karate Kid* films. They stole more than \$2,000 in cash. They also took the bread slicer and the pie oven. Worse still, they tied up Auntie Wei, who looked just like Angela Lansbury in *Murder, She Wrote*.

Auntie Wei says that now she is going to sell her shop.



Influenced by the teen book series *Sweet Valley High*, **TOM CHO** began writing creative works in his mid-teens. He has a PhD in Professional Writing from Deakin University in Australia and, alongside his work as a fiction writer, he has a parallel career as a freelance writer and editor. Like his favorite pop stars, Tom enjoys trying new guises on for size, and his work has been described as being “transgenre, transgender, and transcultural all at once.” His fiction has appeared widely, including in such publications as *The Best Australian Stories* series, *Asia Literary Review* and *The New Quarterly*. He has also performed his work on the stages of many festivals, from Singapore Writers Festival to Sydney Mardi Gras, and even at a Chinatown bar where he toured *Hello Kitty*, an award-winning show that combined literature with karaoke.

Born and raised in Australia, Tom is a newcomer to North America. He is currently writing a novel about the meaning of life. ***tomcho.com***