

***The
Female
of the
Species***

Joanna Murray-Smith



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Introduction

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THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

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CHARACTERS

MARGOT MASON, 60-ish, handsome, impressive, a monster

MOLLY RIVERS, early 20s, bright

TESS THORNTON, 30s, lost

BRYAN THORNTON, 30s but boyish, handsome, genial, thick

THEO HANOVER, 60s, dapper, gay, handsome, refined

FRANK, 20-something, a very handsome, masculine black man

SETTING

A charming house in the country. A elegant study, filled with a lifetime's collection of books, including a shelf dedicated to Margot Mason's own works. Adding to the sense of cultivated taste and a life well-lived, are beautiful rugs and paintings, European and indigenous art works acquired during world travels, antiques, modern pieces—all working beautifully but without design. The room features a large desk, a daybed and French doors opening to a bucolic setting. On either side of the stage are the suggestions of open, painting-lined hallways, one leading to the kitchen, another upstairs. In the study, amongst the objets d'arts, is one bust or small statue.

MARGOT MASON, *an attractive late middle-aged woman, elegantly and casually dressed, wanders around the study speaking on her cordless phone. On her desk are her laptop and a copy of her famous book The Cerebral Vagina. MARGOT is imperious, theatrical and a show-off, but there are signs here of a certain faltering.*

MARGOT: Oh, *fuck off!* No, *you* fuck off! *You* are the reason people say the publishing industry has gone to pot. You and your *Feng Shui for Beginners!* I mean, for Christ's sake, Theo, whatever happened to learned memoirs by men of letters? What ever *happened* to men of letters...? Oh, I see. They're all writing *Feng Shui for Beginners*... And what was that I heard from a little birdie: *Eddie Murphy, Man or Myth?* This from a publishing house that once made its name on the *Dialectical Definitive in Gender Relations*. How do you sleep at night...? No, no I'm working hard. [*Lolling, enervated, on the daybed*] I'm working *very* hard... Stop worrying! I *am* working hard, it's just taking a little longer than I thought... Haven't you got some little hack scribbling chick-lit from some Irish garret? Shopping. Sex. Men are hopeless. 'Juggling'. Honestly, if I hear that word one more time. Fucking *juggling*. Find someone else to fix the company's woes... I *am* working, I told you. [*Ingeniously and casually divesting herself of her bra as she talks without taking anything else off*] You'll get it when you get it... Well, that's *your* problem... No, *that's your problem*... Well, it's just not 'flowing'... [*The bra comes free and she flings it aside.*] I'm not sure why not... It's hard to put into words... Yes, even for me. [*Beat. Slightly trepidatious*] There's this little concept that keeps popping up, Theo: *stagnation*. There's just a tiny, tiny flicker of concern that finally I'm... Well—I'm bored by the sound of my own voice. Ridiculous, I know... Of course, it's absurd. Who's more interesting than *me?* Who's *ever* been more interesting than me...? *Exactly*. I'll be in the city on Thursday... Well, is that any of your business...? All right, a teeny-weeny oil I'm interested in. Didn't sell at Sotheby's... very pretty... very *very* pretty and the possibility of picking it up for a song... Fine. I'll stop by the office and we can go on from there. And this time don't take me anywhere cheap and ethnic. Hello?

She jiggles the buttons on the phone. Dead.

Hello...? Hel-llo? For God's sake.

She hangs up and walks over to her desk, peering at her open laptop. She sits down and looks over what she's been writing. As she thinks of titles, she types them, regarding them on the screen.

The Dialectical Experiment of the Patriarchal Paradigm. Who the fuck is going to buy that? [*Thinking*] It's got to be sexy. Mmm... Something dignified, yet *au courant*. Sex, Death and... no, *The Feminine* something, *The Feminine*... no... Got to get shopping in there somehow, or stilettos or lipstick... Perhaps something that enters the lexicon, some new coining: *Clitorism!* With an exclamation mark. *The Utopian Fallopien?* No. No. My God, woman, *think!* If I could only get the title, the rest would follow! Something simple—

MOLLY: *The Female of the Species.*

MOLLY has entered through the French doors, a young woman somewhat kookily dressed, carrying a shopping bag. MARGOT gives a tiny glance, but is intent on seeing the title on her screen, typing it in immediately. She is captivated by the task at hand.

MARGOT: *The Female of the Species.* Not bad.

MOLLY: I'm good with words.

MARGOT: *The Female of the Species.* [*Thinking*] Surely it's been used?

MOLLY: Sometimes the simple is simply overlooked.

MARGOT: True!

MOLLY: You're working.

MARGOT: I *am* working.

MOLLY: I just came in from the garden.

MARGOT: I can see that.

MOLLY: The doors were open.

MARGOT: So it seems.

MOLLY: French, aren't they?

MARGOT: French? Yes. French doors. I like my doors French.

MOLLY: Why are they?

MARGOT: Why are they?

MOLLY: French.

MARGOT: Because they're stylish, thin and up themselves. *The Female of the Species.* Mmmm. [*Channelling a journalist*] 'Her remarkable

new bestseller, *The Female of the Species*, brilliantly extends the treatise of her earlier hit *Madame Ovary*. ‘Her searing Number One title that has finally eclipsed *The Da Vinci Code* in sales, *The Female of the Species*.’ [Beat.] It’s good.

MOLLY: It is good.

MARGOT: Clever.

MOLLY: I like it.

MARGOT: [*delighted with herself*] It’s amazing how I do that. If I wait for the muse, it comes.

MOLLY: But I—

MARGOT: I come through in the end—I *always* come through!

MOLLY: But I—

MARGOT: You have to trust! It’s always in there!

MOLLY: But I thought of it.

Finally, MARGOT looks up at her.

MARGOT: You did?

MOLLY: Yes.

Beat.

MARGOT: Oh. Well... Are you sure?

MOLLY: Yes. I came in and I said—

MARGOT: Yes, yes! All right! It’s not *that* good! But why am I—This is my—

MOLLY: Yes, it’s—

MARGOT: My house.

MOLLY: Yes.

MARGOT: My room.

MOLLY: Yes.

MARGOT: Those are my French—

MOLLY: Yes.

MARGOT: Doors.

MOLLY: Yes, they are.

MARGOT: I’m at work. I’m working and then—

MOLLY: Here I am.

Beat.

MARGOT: [*calm, but suddenly realising*] Who are you?

MOLLY: You don’t—

MARGOT: *Should* I? I’m sorry but—