

THE FEMALE MIND [A GUIDE FOR MEN] by CHRISTOPHER WALKER

A review type approach of separate scenes, held together by the narrator Dr Steph, and each illustrating a different point about the differences between men and women, gives ultimate cast flexibility. The weighting towards females will make this play an attractive proposition for many sixth forms and amateur dramatic groups, for which it is also very suitable.

Originally, it was performed by a cast of thirty-two, but it could be done with massive doubling, by many fewer than that - or by many more. The cast list below shows the numbers needed in each scene, which will help in the sensible allocation of roles.

CAST

DR STEPH is the one character that cannot be doubled. As she is in every scene, I have not listed her again.

Prologue: JOE

1. In The Beginning: CAVE MAN, CAVE WOMAN,, + 2 extras as Cave Kids
- 2A. Peripheral Vision: SIMON, ALICE, MAP GIRL + 2 extra female passers-by
- 2B. No Way Out: MOTHER, VIRGINIA
- 3A. Female Intuition: MEN: NICK, CHIP, TOM, FRED, IAN, MARTIN
WOMEN: LANA, SARAH, SALLY, ALISON, LIZ, CAROL, BIANCA, LUCY
- 3B. After the Works Do: DAVE, JANICE
- 3C. Men Don't Notice the Details...: GEORGE, GASTON, MAUD
- 3D. ... Women Do: MARK, LAURA
4. Multi-tasking: TONY, SANDRA, DEBBIE, GEMMA, REBECCA
- 5A. Sharing the Burden: LUKE, JULIE
- 5B. Which Shoes?: TIM, BETTY
6. Navigating Skills: GORDON, FLORENCE, PHOEBE
7. Dealing with Stress: LINDSEY, KATHY, NICKY, BEATRICE [all girls]

INTERVAL

8. Communication: PIERRE, GLEN, GARY, TREV, KAREN, SUE, BARBARA
 - 9A. Exercising Demons: SUSAN, SHARON, JEAN, KATIE, GERALDINE, MANDY, CINDY, FEMALE FITNESS INSTRUCTOR
 - 9B. Body Image: ROGER, VANESSA
 - 10A. Cave Love: CAVE MAN, CAVE WOMAN
 - 10B. What She Wants: MICHAEL [played by female], ELIZABETH
 - 10C. What She Gets: HARRY, MARY
 - 10D. Three Little Words: DAVID, GINNY
 - 10E. Is That It?: ALAN, JANET
- Epilogue: JOE

BARE MINIMUM for Cast = 9F and 6M. But they would be very busy indeed!

EXTRACT ONE

PROLOGUE

Stage in darkness. A voice is heard shouting 'I wish I'd never met you!', followed by the sound of a slamming door. Spotlight DSC picks out a forlorn male, coat over his shoulder, staring at the ground.

JOE looking up, aware of an audience Women! Does anyone understand them? All I did was tell her we could discuss our relationship after the match, so I'd not be distracted! What was so wrong with that? She did ASK me if it was 'a good time to talk!' Why do women get so upset when a man gives an honest answer to a question? If they don't want answers, they shouldn't ask us questions. We're not mind readers, are we? If a woman doesn't tell us what she wants, how are we meant to know?

Take when we're getting ready to go out and a woman asks our opinion on what top, purse or shoes go with some outfit. Most guys don't own more than five pairs of shoes in total, so what possesses a woman to think we'd have the first clue how to

match shoes to anything, let alone a dress!?! But. We do our best to help, only to find whatever answer we give is the wrong one. Of course, if they spent less time shopping for things they'd already got plenty of, there wouldn't be a problem.

What I'd really like to know is why, if something I say can be interpreted in two ways and one of those is critical of her, why she automatically assumes that's the one I meant? When I said she'd got a healthy amount of fat on her I meant just that, not that she resembled a beached whale. Why do women seem to look for insults where there aren't any, and then inflict mindless psychological trauma on themselves ... resulting in them going on a diet - the main function of which seems to be to stop ME eating what I like!?

I'll tell you what really annoys me, though. When we're driving somewhere and she's sitting there rotating the map around three hundred and sixty degrees and back again without a clue where we are, goes all quiet, and then has the nerve to suggest I'm lost and need to stop and ask for directions! I NEVER get LOST! [**Realises he has 'lost it' and calms down.**]

If only women were more like men: rational, logical, straight-forward... but they're not. Instead of being complicated and confusing ... why can't they just be ... well ... simple?

A woman in a smart suit, very professional looking, steps out of the shadows behind him and taps him on the shoulder.

DR STEPH Women are really very simple to understand, Joe ... if men like you only took the time to listen, use your eyes, develop some emotional sensitivity...

JOE looking confused Who on earth are you? And how do you know my name?

DR STEPH Doctor Steph at your service. [**Shakes his hand.**] I'm a socio-biologist, an expert in studying how human behaviour is influenced by our evolutionary and genetic make-up, and you should think yourself very lucky.

JOE Oh, why's that then?

DR STEPH Because tonight, Joe, I'm going to help you - and all those other people here - understand the female mind. So just go and sit at the back, out of the way like a good boy, and all will be made clear.

JOE Well, I guess I've got nothing better to do, so ... [**He starts to walk off, then turns.**] Hey! You still didn't tell me how you knew my name.

DR STEPH Female intuition, of course. I'm a WOMAN! You don't need to tell me everything - I just know. [**To the audience.**] Every woman knows Joe Average when she sees him. Now, to business. Men and women are different. Same species and equal we may be, but identical? 'Fraid not. Our brains aren't wired quite the same. You men out there may have some vague notion there's scientific evidence which supports that idea, but every woman in the audience already KNOWS it's true. We have all the evidence we need.

EXTRACT TWO

ALICE ... I'm telling you, there is nothing worse than a man who can't control his wandering eye.

As she says this another attractive girl walks by from right to left and, yet again, Simon instinctively turns his head to get a proper look.

DR STEPH And again. She could hardly miss that one.

Simon is still staring in the direction of the retreating girl. Alice is facing forward but clearly aware and seething. She folds her arms and coughs impatiently. He turns back to face her looking innocent.

ALICE My, didn't she look nice!

SIMON unaware what Alice is doing What? Who?

ALICE That girl. Fantastic legs. Toned like a model's. Wouldn't you say?

SIMON I - I ... er ... didn't notice. I was looking at ... rather, I got distracted with ... [*Catching her look and realising the trap, he changes his answer mid-sentence.*] how long her hair was. It was really long, wasn't it? Much too long! ... [*Noticing his partner twirling her own long hair.*] ... not that long hair isn't attractive. Yours is perfect, but hers ... hers ... it was kind of matted and ... and, well ... [*Giving up.*] Did I mention how radiant you look today?

ALICE Do you think I'm blind?

SIMON *aside* Obviously not. [*To Alice, acting dumb.*] I'm sorry, but I'm not sure I follow. What specifically are you asking me?

ALICE Specifically, do you think I haven't seen you practically undressing every bit of skirt that's walked past since we stepped out of the door?

SIMON What? I have not...

ALICE You have! Do you know how insulting that is? I let it go the first few times. I know you men have urges, but enough is enough. How would you like it if I couldn't keep my eyes off every man to walk past?

DR STEPH He'd never notice.

SIMON Errr...?

ALICE Exactly! While you are admiring other women's legs and cup sizes, do you ever spare a thought for how that makes me feel? Am I really so uninteresting? Do I already bore you so much? Simon!!?

SIMON What? No. Not at all.

ALICE I don't think you've paid attention to one word I've said today. It hurts, Simon. *While Alice has been speaking a further attractive girl has entered from Stage Left, studying a street map and obviously trying to get her bearings.*

ALICE I feel like you don't want to be with me any more ... that ... that you ... don't love me.

Alice stares at Simon, waiting expectantly for an answer while he struggles to make sense of this logic. It is during this pregnant moment that the girl with the map notices them and tentatively approaches.

MAP GIRL Excuse me.

SIMON *welcoming the distraction* Yes?

MAP GIRL I'm sorry. I hope I'm not interrupting you, but ...

SIMON No, no ... not at all. What can I do for you?

Alice gives him a killer look which he fails to notice and turns to face downstage, observing them with her peripheral vision.

MAP GIRL *doing the whole damsel-in-distress act* Well, I'm trying to get to Church Road, I'd be so grateful for your help. I'm just hopeless with maps.

SIMON Of course, no problem. You're not far off at all. It's very simple. See here ... [*Leaning in close to her to look at the map and point.*] - This is where you are. Just go to the end of this road, then go west for ... [*Thinks.*] ... must be about eighty yards...

MAP GIRL *helplessly* Yards?

SIMON Then north into Albert Street. After that, it's the second road on your right going north east. You'll be there in two minutes.

MAP GIRL *confused* Sorry. Could you just repeat that.

ALICE *sharply* Go to the end of this street, turn left at Top Shop, carry on till you get to Boots, then turn right, then carry on and, funnily enough, Church Road is the one with the great big church, steeple and all, so you can't really miss it.

MAP GIRL *reassured, but reading Alice's tone of voice* Ah. Right. Well, thank you both very much for your help.

SIMON Actually, we need to go that way too. We can show you...

ALICE *yanking him back* Oh no, we're not! Sorry. Very busy day. Lots to do. What

a shame! Thank you. Bye. Goodbye. [**Waving her off with a frosty smile and glaring at Simon who watches her exit.**] What was that?

SIMON What was what?

ALICE You were flirting with her.

SIMON No, I wasn't!

ALICE You most certainly were. You kept on making eye contact and leaning in towards her.

SIMON I was looking at the map...

EXTRACT THREE

DR STEPH In contrast, nurturing woman doesn't miss a thing, chaps! She's aware of your every non-verbal signal or shift of voice and instantly senses, from all that uneasy body language and avoidance of her eyes, when you are telling her porkies. For millennia, men have been bravely trying to fool their women, and they fail every time! A man has more chance of getting away with it on the phone, in the dark, or with a bag on his head! If you forgot that special meal the lady in your life was preparing, to go for a drink with some friends after work - gentlemen, you are better off telling the truth and pleading for forgiveness. She knows anyway!

Man enters quietly, uneasily, from behind and right of the couch. There is the slightest shift in the woman's body language to indicate, without having looked, that she is aware of his presence. She continues 'reading', waiting. The man, dressed as if from the office, but with his tie hanging from an open collar, knocks over an object. The woman's body stiffens, lips tight, but she says nothing. He knows she must have heard.

MARK *nervously* Evening, dear.

Her only response is to snap the book shut, eyebrows raised.

MARK Err ... I hope I'm not too late.

LAURA *sarcastic* No! Not really, it's just ... what? Eight o'clock.

MARK *feigning surprise* You're kidding. [**Looks at watch.**] My watch only says quarter past six. Look! [**Holds his wrist out but she doesn't look.**] Stupid! Cheap! Twenty quid watch!

LAURA So. Why are you late?

MARK *stalling* There's a very good reason. You won't believe it, though ... because it's just ... unbelievable.

LAURA Try me.

MARK Yes. What happened was ... the boss quit this morning. Pressure got too much - and he trashed the whole office before he left. It was hell to pay, for us. Chucked stuff out of the window. Poured coffee over everything. Smashed the copier...

LAURA Why?

MARK Why'd he smash the copier?

LAURA Why was it hell to pay for you?

MARK Well, we all had to clean up the mess.

LAURA Wouldn't that be a job for the cleaning staff?

MARK Well, normally, yes, but they said it wasn't in their job specification and the boss was so angry that he sacked every one of them.

LAURA Even though he'd quit?

MARK Ah, no, well that was the new boss. His deputy took over.

LAURA Wouldn't that be you?

MARK That's only on Tuesdays. Today is Friday...

EXTRACT FOUR

Mum - Sandra - stands ironing, SR; Dad - Tony - is on a couch CSL, intensely focused on tuning a large telly the back of which faces DS. A child of about 1 - Rebecca - kneels doing homework CSR. In a separate area of the stage, SL, a friend - Debbie - stands pressing the digits on a phone. Sandra's phone rings.

SANDRA *switching mobile on* Hello?

DEBBIE Hi, Sandra. How are you doing? We've not talked since Tuesday, have we?

SANDRA No, I'm sorry. I've just been so busy, Debbie. Took the dogs for their boosters, the kids needed new shoes and planning for the holiday already.

DEBBIE Oh, that's right. Won't be long now, will it? Bet you're looking forward to a nice break.

SANDRA We've never been to Cornwall before. Tony's been buying guide books and working out what's to see and do. You know how he likes to plan things in advance. Just like a General plotting the campaign, he is. We've got a nice caravan by the sea sorted and the coach tickets are paid for. We leave on the 16th....

Rebecca moves to sit by Dad, holding exercise book open.

SANDRA ... so all we have to hope for is good weather, not like when we went to Morecambe.

REBECCA *overlapping with above* Dad. Can you name any of Henry the Eighth's wives?

TONY I really need to concentrate, Rebecca. Ask your mother.

SANDRA ... and the only day it didn't rain was when we came home.

Rebecca approaches.

SANDRA Yes, dear?

REBECCA I need to know Henry the Eighth's wives for my History homework.

SANDRA Katherine of Aragon. Ann Boleyn. Jane Seymour. Anne of Cleves. Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr.

REBECCA Mum, you're awesome.

SANDRA *to Debbie* We just walked around all day with umbrellas and sugared donuts, or stayed in the guest house watching telly.

DEBBIE Oh, that reminds me. Did you get your TV fixed?

SANDRA The repair man said it was beyond saving. Tony had to buy a new one and he's been busy trying to programme the channels all evening. It's one of those wide-screen stereo-dolby multiple surround sound something or others. You know. Does everything but fry an egg. Boys and their toys, eh?

DEBBIE So how's he doing?

SANDRA Oh, all he's got is spinning grey haze so far.

TONY *looking around, agitated* Sandra? Have you moved the manual?

SANDRA I think you'll find it's to the left of the sofa on the floor, where you put it when you went to check the aerial.

TONY *looks and finds* Oh. Right. [*Sits thumbing through and studying.*]

SANDRA I hope he gets it sorted before his parents come to visit us tomorrow night. Otherwise I don't know what we'll do when conversation dries up after dinner.

DEBBIE I'm going out for dinner with Eric at the weekend. It's our anniversary. He always takes me out for dinner for a surprise on our anniversary. At least he remembers. [*She mimes continued conversation during the following.*]

Older daughter, Gemma, rushes in carrying two blouses or dresses, one of which would expose more flesh than the other.

GEMMA Mum! I'm not sure what to wear to go out in. This is okay I think [*Flashing one at her quickly.*] but I'd look way more grown-up in this one. [*Holding it in front.*]

SANDRA What about that lovely pastel pink dress with the ribbons Grandma brought you?

GEMMA Mum! That was when I was twelve! I don't want to look like a child. I'm nearly fifteen!

SANDRA Well, you're certainly not leaving the house in that one. [*Pointing to the more revealing garment.*] It shows far too much flesh.

GEMMA Oh Mum!

SANDRA That would send altogether the wrong signals to this boy. Especially on a first date. What do you want him to think?

GEMMA That maybe I'm cool.

SANDRA Well, I would never have worn anything like that. I want to see you in something which goes up to your neck and down past your knees. [*Mimes chatting with Debbie.*]

GEMMA hoping to get round Dad Daaaad!

TONY without looking How much?

GEMMA Dad! Which dress/ top do you think I should wear?

TONY I'm a bit busy, sweetheart.

GEMMA Please, Dad. Just have a quick look.

TONY glances and scents danger Whichever your Mother says you can.

GEMMA Thanks a lot for your help. When I end up with no boyfriend at all then you'll both be happy! [*She storms out in a sulk.*]

SANDRA as if continuing ... hadn't really given any thought to Claire's party yet. What are you going to wear?

DEBBIE Maybe that blue dress I prized out of Eric for my birthday last year... [*Mimes continuing.*]

REBECCA going to Sandra Mum. Are you any good at geography?

SANDRA What do you need to know?

REBECCA Which is the deepest ocean?

SANDRA The Pacific, I think. But go check the wall-chart on your bedroom wall.

[*Rebecca exits.*] Yes, Debbie, that blue dress does show off your figure without it looking like you're trying too hard.

DEBBIE But I haven't really got any jewellery that goes with it. Have you got anything I could borrow?

SANDRA Chunky or tinkly, dear?

DEBBIE Tinkly if you don't mind. I'm not keen on chunky.

SANDRA Well, if you pop round a day or two before to give me an opinion on which dress I should wear, I'll get my tinkly box out for you. [*Folding final shirt.*] Oh, just a sec, Debbie. Tony?

TONY not looking Huh?

SANDRA Could you possibly take this pile of ironing up to the bedroom and put it away, dear?

TONY I'm sorry, Sandra, but I can't do umpteen things at once. I only have one pair of hands.

Sandra sighs wearily but knowingly and they freeze.

EXTRACT FIVE

LESSON 8: COMMUNICATION

DR STEPH All here? Very well, then, let's take a look at communication. A major result of women's need to talk is that they're generally better at it than men. Women are able to open up and discuss the most intimate and personal experiences, unashamedly, with their girl friends. Men on a night out, however, would far rather evade talking about anything remotely personal. Which can somewhat limit the scope of their conversation... as we shall see here.

Stage right three women assemble around a restaurant table; stage left three men seat themselves around a small table at a pub. [In the original

production, these men were also played by women.] A French waiter approaches the women.

PIERRE Bonjour. Your wine, ladies. [*Setting a bottle down, he smiles at Barbara who shyly returns the smile.*] Enjoy! I await ze opportunity to be of further service. [*He leaves.*]

KAREN Well, you never know! The night is young and we do want to try everything on the menu, don't we?! [*She fills their glasses.*]

BARBARA raising her eyebrows I'm not saying anything, Karen. Except - remember when you tried Italian.

Karen is momentarily chastened by an unpleasant memory.

SUE Well, I'm between men and I plan to enjoy it.

BARBARA Sounds like a plan! A toast to you then, Sue, and to the joys of being single again. [*She stands, followed by Karen and Sue. They all take a sip of their wine.*]

SUE To think I wasted a whole year with Stephen, the most selfish, self-obsessed, boring, conceited, horriblemest, meanest ...

KAREN coaxing Now, you promised us you'd have fun tonight, Sue.

BARBARA But first, tell us how you got rid of the jerk!

SUE as Karen and Barbara lean in Well, I just told him straight, I said to him [*In gruff voice.*] 'Take a walk, a very long walk, in fact, take the longest walk ever - and don't come back!'

BARBARA You didn't say that, did you?

SUE in sweet voice, looking proud of herself I certainly did, Barbara.

KAREN So, where is he now?

SUE sheepish Staying with Mike - three doors up. [*Sips wine and looks away.*]

KAREN & BARBARA exchanging glances Oh!

BARBARA So. Karen. How are you and the -lovely - David getting along?

KAREN pretends confusion David?

SUE sharply Karen!

KAREN Oh! That David. The one I was - 'seeing'. Well, he wasn't exactly what I was looking for. I decided I could do better.

BARBARA Karen, dear, I hate to break it to you, but Johnny Depp really is taken. David may not have been perfect but he was a sweet, attentive - interesting man.

KAREN Even if he did look like Jesus and smell like a fish.

ALL laughing He did!

BARBARA Well, there's always other fish in the sea. And - while you're waiting for him - more wine? [*She stands and starts to pour.*]

DR STEPH While Karen, Sue and Barb are well stuck into the subject of each others' private lives, can the same be said of Gary, Glen and Trev over at the pub, who have been out together just as long?

Cut to the three men, sitting in a semi-circle. All three have pint glasses and are supping while glancing around. None are making eye-contact with each other.

GLEN I'm sure something's changed in here.

All three slowly look up, then down, and then scan from left to right until -

GARY The colour.

TREV It's different wallpaper.

GLEN It used to be blue. Yellow now.

Trev and Gary nod in agreement, sup pints again and pause.

GLEN Beer's expensive here, Gary.

GARY I know. £2.65.

TREV Outrageous!

Pause, during which all three pick up pints at the same time, take a drink, put the glass down and cough.

TREV You get that new car then, Gary?

GARY Yeah. Came last week.

GLEN *after pause for thought* How much?

GARY Twelve G. Nice car. Midnight blue. From nought to sixty in four and a half seconds!

TREV Nice.

GARY Yeah.

Pause. Pints are supped...