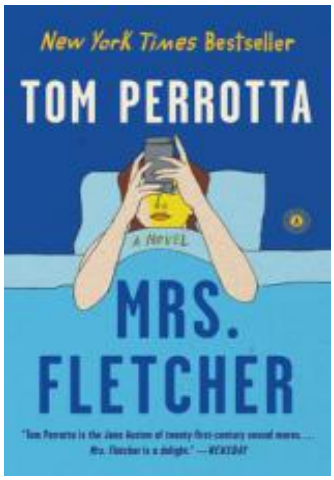
Mrs. Fletcher

by Tom Perrotta



About the Book

From one of the most popular and bestselling authors of our time, a penetrating and hilarious new novel about sex, love and identity on the frontlines of America?s culture wars.

Eve Fletcher is trying to figure out what comes next. A 46-year-old divorcee whose beloved only child has just left for college, Eve is struggling to adjust to her empty nest when one night her phone lights up with a text message. Sent from an anonymous number, the mysterious sender tells Eve, ?*U R my MILF*!? Over the months that follow, that message comes to obsess Eve. While leading her all-too-placid life --- serving as Executive Director of the local senior center by day and taking a community college course on Gender and Society at night --- Eve can?t curtail her own interest in a porn website called MILFateria.com, which features the erotic exploits of ordinary, middle-aged women like herself. Before long, Eve?s online fixations begin to spill over into real life, revealing new romantic possibilities that threaten to upend her quiet suburban existence.

Meanwhile, miles away at the state college, Eve?s son Brendan --- a jock and aspiring frat boy --- discovers that his new campus isn?t nearly as welcoming to his hard-partying lifestyle as he had imagined. Only a few weeks into his freshman year, Brendan is floundering in a college environment that challenges his white-dude privilege and shames him for his outmoded, chauvinistic ideas of sex. As the New England autumn turns cold, both mother and son find themselves enmeshed in morally fraught situations that come to a head on one fateful November night.

Sharp, witty and provocative, MRS. FLETCHER is a timeless examination of sexuality, identity, parenthood, and the big clarifying mistakes people can make when they?re no longer sure of who they are or where they belong.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with Eve privately lamenting that ?big days? (page 3) are never as special as they should be. Are

there other ?big days,? beyond dropping Brendan off at college, that fail to go the way she hopes?

2. Receiving that fateful, inappropriate text message --- ?U r my MILF!? (page 40) --- has a profound effect on Eve, plunging her into the world of MILF porn and ongoing sexual fantasies about other women. Why do you think the text impacts Eve so deeply? How relevant do you think it is that her sexual exploration begins because someone else sees her as desirable, rather than emerging from solely internal motivation?

3. How are the dynamics of Eve and Amanda?s ?date? influenced by Eve?s consumption of porn? Do you see her porn use as compulsive? Empowering? Something else?

4. At their dinner out, Eve and Amanda invent names for their alter egos: Ursula and Juniper. Does Eve?s engagement with Amanda, taking a Gender and Society class, and sexual acting out feel like an embrace of this alter ego? Do you think Eve is trying to ?find herself,? or is she trying to become someone else?

5. Brendan occupies a position of privilege in the world and on his college campus, yet he can?t seem to adjust to his new environment. Why do you think that is? Is it related to his sense of privilege, or does his discomfort come from elsewhere?

6. How would you describe the relationship between Brendan and Zack at first? What changes? Why do you think Zack distances himself from the friendship?

7. Brendan and Julian are both young, straight, white cisgender men taking college classes, yet they occupy their positions of privilege in very dissimilar ways. What do they have in common, and how are they different?

8. Despite herself, Eve is attracted to Julian and Amanda --- both generationally younger and more progressive than she is. What do you think she finds appealing about each of them?

9. Amber uses the Autism Awareness Network to bond with Brendan and to try to engage him politically. What are her plans for him? On page 126, she says, ?That?s how we change the world. One person at a time.? Is Amanda trying to ?change? Brendan, and if so, does she succeed?

10. Brendan is jealous of his dad?s relationship with Jon-Jon, his autistic half-brother, even though Jon-Jon is fairly low-functioning. When he has a temper tantrum on Parents Weekend, Brendan thinks about ?how unfair it was that [his] father loved him so much and held him so tight --- way tighter than he?d ever held [Brendan] --- and wouldn?t let him go no matter what? (page 137). Can you empathize with Brendan?s pain, or do you think he is just being selfish?

11. When Amber and Brendan hook up, they have a sexual miscommunication that leads her to regard him as a ?huge disappointment? (page 207). What?s Brendan?s role in the situation? What?s Amber?s?

12. By the time Eve, Amanda and Julian have sex together, each has been fantasizing about the others for weeks or months. When their private fantasies enter the public sphere, what changes?

13. Eve texts Julian a picture of herself, but she won?t go over to his parents? house to have sex with him. Why does she draw the line there? Do you think her reluctance to fully engage with Julian is about their age difference, or morality, or

self-respect, or fear, or something else entirely? As a reader, does their age difference matter to you? And does it involve a different ethical calculation than it would if she were an older man and he a younger woman?

14. Professor Fairchild is an example of a character who, unlike Eve, has undergone a significant and permanent transformation. What do you make of their friendship? What does Eve hope to get from Margo, and Margo from Eve?

15. At the end of the novel, Eve settles back into conventionality, embracing a heterosexual relationship with someone her own age. At their wedding, however, Eve has a moment of doubt: she wonders if it was George, her soon-to-be husband, who sent her the MILF text message all those months ago. Who do you think it was? So much of *Mrs. Fletcher* is about characters? hidden fantasies, unknown to all but the reader --- except when those fantasies break through into real life, as they do with Eve, Julian and Amanda. Do you think the characters we know less about have secret selves, secret ?Ursulas,? too? Does everyone?

Author Bio

Tom Perrotta is the author of 11 works of fiction, including ELECTION and LITTLE CHILDREN, both of which were made into Oscar-nominated films, and THE LEFTOVERS and MRS. FLETCHER, which were adapted into acclaimed HBO series. His new novel is GHOST TOWN.

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