

Margaret, a lonely 72-year-old widow, is put on a dating app by her friends and soon finds herself juggling three boyfriends while avoiding her controlling son's efforts to take away his "aging" mother's freedoms.

Margaret Goes to Town: A Mature Comedy Romance
By Tina Field Howe

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Margaret Goes to Town

A Mature Comedy Romance



Tina Field Howe

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Reader Comments

“Being a part of Margaret’s world is delightful. Her creative and quirky ways of dealing with love and grief are truly inspiring and fun!”

Seda Anbarci, Screenwriter & Filmmaker

“I enjoyed the book tremendously. It reminded me of my life and playing cards with friends and family. It’s a wonderful story, and I wish it hadn’t ended!”

Pinky Henson

“Each character is imbued with their own unique quirks and traits, which adds depth and authenticity to the story. Their interactions are filled with warmth and genuine camaraderie, offering readers a glimpse into the power of female friendships.”

Rick “Boomer” Murrhee, Screenwriter

“If I become a widow in my 70s, I certainly want to have the same disposition as Margaret!”

Andrea Cabañas, Screenwriter & Author

3.

Dwighty

Connie said, “Look at this! A ton of matches came up right away on *Geezers Go Out!*” She looked down through the list and continued, “A lot more than I expected. Wow.”

“I’m not even on Facebook, why would I want to be on a dating app?” demanded Margaret.

“To find a hiking buddy, of course.”

“No, no, no, no, no!” Margaret tried to snatch the laptop, but Connie fiercely guarded it.

Eudora watched over Connie’s shoulder as she confidently explained, “You know how much I love marketing.”

Margaret strained to see the screen. “Marketing? Just what are you marketing?”

Connie proudly demonstrated. “First, I typed up a brief profile. Then I uploaded a stunning photo I found in your cloud, selected the ages of men you’re looking for, your interests, photography included, and voila!”

Eudora remarked, “Ooh, that was fast! May I see?”

“Take. It. Down,” ordered Margaret.

“Now, Margaret,” persuaded Connie, “you owe it to yourself to at least give it a try.”

“Exactly what kind of matches are we talking about?” asked Margaret and she nudged Connie out of the way and slid on her bifocals. Margaret’s eyes attacked the screen. “I can’t believe you did this without asking me! I mean, eww, look at those dudes!” She read her profile aloud, “‘Looking for males age sixty to eighty.’ Eighty, really? ‘Interests: hiking,

photography, dining out, travel, companionship?" Margaret squinted at Connie and continued, "Is 'companionship' some kind of porn lingo I should be aware of? These days, you never know."

Connie laughed. "On this particular site the word means not serious. Casual. *Friends*."

Calmer, Margaret raised her eyebrows and said, "You sure about that? How do you know so much about how this site works? Have you been doing some of your own 'online shopping?'"

Connie grinned, shrugged, and forged ahead, "You'll have a hiking buddy in no time, I promise."

"I suppose the only thing worse would be if nobody contacted me," said Margaret with a tinge of relief.

"Impossible," assured Connie, "I mean, look at that profile pic! What a cougar, grr!"

"I'm too old to be a cougar!" retorted Margaret, "And I don't want to be a cougar."

Margaret's photo showed her driving the boat, her sparkling hair blowing in the wind as she cast the photographer a look of love.

"Okay," replied Margaret, "that's a cougar alright, but I was ten years younger. Paul took it." She sighed. "It was a perfect summer day. Dreamy. Just before we found out—"

Eudora edged in between them so she could see the photo better and said, "It is beautiful, Margaret."

Margaret shook her head and took a closer look at the profile. "What's this? I'm seventy-two, not sixty-two! Change it back. I've never hidden my age and I'm not gonna start hiding it now."

"But everyone misrepresents," advised Connie. "Think about it, where's the harm?"

Margaret crossed her arms. "That would make me a fraud." She followed with a conflicted sigh and demanded, "Okay, leave the photo but fix my age."

"Way to go, baby!" Connie changed the age to seventy-two. "There, happy? For cryin' out loud, you made a bigger deal out of this than the great Beach Boys and Beatles debate of sixty-seven."

"The what?" asked clueless Eudora.

"Never mind," said Connie, "you had to be there."

Margaret gave a resigned sigh, returned to the sink, and thought, *Whatever. After you leave, I'm deleting the profile.*

"Aww...," Connie sighed, "look at that. After I changed your age, the number of matches dropped down. *Way* down."

"That is a shame," said Eudora.

Margaret turned to her friends and remarked, "At this moment I'm questioning if this is a card group or group therapy."

Connie gave her a sincere look. "It's time to get back out there —"

"— Says who?" demanded Margaret.

"And this is what it takes," Connie added firmly. "I simply took the initiative because, darn it, I care, Margaret. You're much too *you* to be alone."

"I don't have a freaking clue what you mean by that, but all I can say is you must really want to sell my photography."

"Hmm, that wasn't my conscious intent, but now that you mention it..." With a smile Connie grabbed a notepad, scribbled on it, tore off a sheet, and passed it to Eudora who handed it to Margaret.

Connie said, "Username and password."

Margaret cringed. "Dare I ask?"

Connie grinned. "Your username is 'Lady of the Lake.'"

Eudora said, "That is, how do you say, picture-like and also very appropriate!"

"I think you mean 'picturesque?'" Margaret looked at the slip of paper and mused, "Lady of the Lake. Hmm, I guess it's not so terrible." She pointed the slip of paper at Connie. "But just so you know, your work was for naught because I am *not* going to contact a single man on that site."

"Margaret...!" said exasperated Connie, and her shoulders slumped.

Suddenly concerned Eudora asked, "You will not be contacting any *married* men, will you?"

"*Married* men," Margaret chuckled, "where'd you get that idea from, Eudora?"

Eudora waved it off and breathed a sigh of relief.

Margaret heard the toilet flush and whispered, "That reminds me, whatever you do, do not let Angela know about this..."

Nobody heard the bathroom door open.

Connie said, "My lips are sealed—"

"—What did I miss?" interrupted Angela.

Connie shut the laptop and Margaret shoved the slip of paper into her pocket. The three not-so-innocently replied in unison, "Nothing..."

Eudora rose, gave Angela a harsh glance, and hurried to the bathroom. Angela nestled back into the sofa.

Curiously quiet, Margaret swiped a dishcloth over the peninsula. Connie remained uncomfortably silent. Time to change the subject.

Margaret rinsed the dishcloth, wrung it out, plastered on a fake smile, and gestured to the deck. "Shall we? We can watch for Oscar while Eudora's— um — indisposed."

Angela complained, "But I just sat down!"

"Then you can stay there," Margaret replied, "or go home, it's up to you. But the rest of us are going—" and she jerked her head at the backyard.

Eudora returned and with a huge sigh said, "I feel so much better!"

"Glad to hear everything's back in order," said Connie.

The laptop *dinged*. Angela looked around. "What was that?"

The three glanced at the laptop and in unison said, "Nothing..."

"Well, it wasn't nothing!" Angela glared at them as if she knew they were hiding something.

Margaret covered, "It was the stove timer. I forgot to turn it off." She randomly tapped buttons on its console. The beeps were not the same as those that had issued from the laptop, but they were beeps nonetheless.

Angela looked around. "I've been meaning to ask, Margaret. How do you afford this place? I mean, the taxes alone on the lake...?"

"I'm good, Angela, as if it's any —" But Margaret thought better about opening that can of worms. What she wanted to say was, *Mind your own freakin' business, biotch!* Instead, she said, "Let me just say, Paul set me up just fine. Dwight's set, too. Financially, neither I nor his family will ever have a care in the world."

"Lucky you," replied Angela and with a smirk made a mental note.

"Shall we?" Margaret asked as she headed to the patio door.

The sound of a bouncing basketball seeped through an open front window.

"What's that?" asked Angela with an ear to the driveway.

When Connie and Eudora went to the window, Margaret took the opportunity to open the laptop. The beep was an incoming message on *Geezers Go Out!* She opened her mouth in surprise and shut both it and the laptop before the others noticed.

A sexy black Jeep was parked in the driveway behind Connie's sedan. Dwight Warner, Margaret's son, dribbled a basketball in the space Connie had left open between her car and the garage.

Dwight had a full head of curly blond hair, a clean-shaven face, and dimples. He wore sweatpants and a purple T-shirt which hugged his strong torso. At forty, he was still quite the heartthrob.

"Dwight's here," said Connie without any attachment, and she and Eudora returned to the peninsula.

"He is?!" Angela rose to her feet lickety-split and hustled to the window. It did not go unnoticed by the three that she moved faster than they'd seen her move in ages and without complaint.

Angela watched Dwight make a layup shot at the hoop above the garage door. The ball sailed through, and he pranced around mimicking the sound of a cheering crowd.

"I haven't seen him in quite a while," said Angela. "He's so dreamy..." It appeared it wasn't just high school girls who swooned over Dwight. "What is he, forty now?"

Margaret mumbled, "Forty going on twelve." She added, "He's not too old to adopt, you know. But you'd have to clear it with Sybil first."

Angela brightened and for a moment appeared as though she might be considering it, but tittered and said, "You're too funny, Margaret."

"Aren't I though?"

Connie and Eudora giggled.

Dwight took one last shot. The ball dropped through the hoop and bounced into the grass. He leaned on his knees to catch his breath, recovered, bounded to the front door, and flung it open. He called out, "Mother!" and stepped inside.

Angela hurried to meet him and with a flirtatious smile said, "Hello, Dwighty!"

He lifted her hand, bowed, and said with British affectation, "Good day, Lady Angela," and kissed it.

She giggled and her face flushed – twitterpated!

Margaret blanched and thought, *Please don't encourage her, her heart can't take it.* She said, "Son of mine, you might've noticed that there is a doorbell."

Dwight acted as if he hadn't heard, but Margaret had no doubt that he had. She glanced at the wall clock. "Early school dismissal?"

"The school year's over, remember? Did you forget I'm coaching summer ball? Just stopping by to check on you."

"You know Wednesday's card day. If I hadn't answered the door for one of my friends this morning, all of whom *ring the doorbell*, by the way, one of them would've alerted you by now."

Angela offered, "I can check on her anytime you want, Dwighty –"

"– No! That really is not necessary," countered Margaret. "I'm not planning an exit from this lifetime anytime soon."

Missing the point entirely, Dwight added, "Sure, if it's no bother, Lady Angela..." He drifted into the kitchen with Angela on his heels and said to Margaret's two cohorts, "There's trouble!"

Eudora and Connie lifted their hands to be kissed. He ignored them and instead patted them on the head. He opened the fridge and snapped the lid off the casserole. "Yum, chicken!"

"Not just any chicken," said Connie, "chicken bazoombas."

Angela cast her a bitter look.

"Italian? Hmm, looks good," replied Dwight, "but I'll pass."

"Fix you and Sybil plates to go?" Margaret offered, stressing the words, 'to go.'

"Naw, Sybil's making something special for tonight."

He stuck the casserole lid in Margaret's hand and grabbed a bottle of sparkling water, screwed off the cap, and took a swig. With a scowl, Margaret replaced the casserole lid.

Dwight also neglected to shut the fridge and turned to the women, "What no good are you ladies up to?"

Margaret shut the fridge door with a *thump* and cast a warning glance at Connie and Eudora. The two innocently replied, "Nothing..."

Angela continued to stare longingly at Dwight who was accustomed to being stared at.

Margaret pivoted. "Dwight, you didn't cover the boat after you used it last weekend. I don't like it being left open like that. The seat cushions get all buggy."

He snickered. "Have you taken the boat out?"

"Maybe," Margaret teased.

"Mother, either you have, or you haven't." He startled. "Have you had any other lapses in memory?"

"I haven't had a first one." Margaret peered with mock concern into his eyes. "Have *you* had any lapses of memory?"

"Not that I recall..."

"If you don't recall, how do you know?"

Connie and Eudora giggled.

"Mother...!" Dwight glared at her friends. "You ladies are supposed to be helping." He gave his mother a blank stare and continued, "Anyway, we're coming up on Saturday. The Fourth, big holiday weekend. The weather's supposed to be awesome."

"Good to know. I'll expect you to put the cover on the boat when you're done. And don't forget to top off the gas tank."

He shrugged, code for 'Whatever.'

Angela begged, "Dwighty, will you please stop by my place? I need something fixed. Plumbing, I think."

Again, with affectation, "It will be a privilege, Lady Angela." He turned serious and addressed the women. "Have you ladies made any headway?"

Connie and Eudora met Margaret with guilty glances and looked away. Margaret squinted at them and asked, "Headway with what, exactly?"

Dwight replied, "We're trying to talk some sense into you, Mother. Why do you insist on staying up here all alone?"

Margaret cast a sour look at her friends. "'We?' Is this true? You've been ganging up on me, going behind my back? I was under the impression you *had* my back!"

As if to exonerate themselves, Connie and Eudora aimed guilty nods at Angela. Angela seized the moment and interjected, "She won't listen to good sense, Dwight. I'm up here all alone, too. I'd sell my place in a heartbeat and move into town. I'd take the bedroom that faces the church across the street, which would be such a comfort to me..."

Margaret took all four of them to task. "For the hundredth time, there are reasons I gave Dwight the house in town and moved up here *permanently*. One of those reasons was too many memories of his father."

Dwight opened his mouth to counter her, but her upheld palm stopped him in his tracks. It's true that there are memories here too, but another reason was I also couldn't take the neighbors' sorrowful looks every time I walked down the street, saw them in a restaurant, or ran into them at the grocery store."

Dwight said, "I don't think you've been to town since you moved up here, Mother. That isn't healthy, and I should know because I teach health."

Angela nodded in agreement. Margaret ignored her. Connie and Eudora drew a breath, awaiting the repercussion.

Margaret reached down deep and mustered her calm. "I know this is hard for *all of you* to understand because you don't

live in my skin. You can't possibly understand my experiences and feelings because they're *mine*." She refocused her thoughts. "Do you really want to know what I want? I want you to support my decision to live where I want to live and *how* I want to live. Period."

"Okay, okay, got it, Mother, jeez," Dwight quipped, the victim whose nose was clearly bent out of shape.

Right, thought Margaret, *until the next time*.

"Anyway," Dwight brushed off the rebuff, "I'll be bringing Sybil and Timothy along on Saturday after grocery shopping. What're you out of?"

Margaret said, "Oh, let me see. Solitude... Respect... Acceptance... I'll text a list."

It was time for someone to change this repeated topic of contention. Eudora piped up, "Do you have a life preserver for Timothy?"

"Of course, Eudora," said Margaret. "They all wear them. That's Margaret's Law."

"Thank goodness!" Eudora sighed, "I always wear mine."

"But that makes sense because you can't swim," added Connie.

"This is true," said Eudora.

Angela pressed, "What about my repair, Dwighty?"

"After boating I'll stop by with my toolbox and will fix – whatever it is that needs fixing."

Angela added, "I'll make coffee cake!" Less exuberant to Margaret, she added, "You can come if you want."

"Goody," said Margaret, unenthused.

"Until then, Lady Angela." Dwight bowed and Angela giggled.

It's time to end this, thought Margaret and she said dryly, "You know where the boat keys are."

Dwight nodded and said, "Later, ladies." He hustled out the front door, picked up the basketball, and hopped into his Jeep. He backed out of the driveway and peeled out.

Angela lamented, "I wish I had a son."

Margaret replied, "The offer to adopt still stands."

"Margaret!" exclaimed Angela.

"Don't get me wrong, I love him dearly," Margaret confessed, "but that doesn't blind me from reality."

Angela judged, "He is such a gift."

Margaret shrugged, "Realistic is as realistic does."

Angela countered the statement with a blank stare.

A lightbulb went off in Eudora's mind. "'The first key to greatness is to be in reality what we appear to be.' Socrates."

Margaret nodded, "Thank you, Eudora, I'm going to embroider that one on a pillow."

Clueless Angela looked between the three. "But what does it mean?"

"It's simple," illuminated Connie. "It's about presenting your real self to others."

"I don't get it," said Angela. But then, she never would.

The three chuckled in an inside joke kind of way, to which Angela took umbrage. Slighted again.

Eudora watched a boat motor up to the dock. "My Oscar is here. Goodbye, ladies." She rose, opened the sliding screen door, and stepped onto the deck.

Margaret stood in the doorway. "Bye, Eudora, see you next week."

Connie stood next to her and called out, "Stop in the store if you come to town."

Eudora gave them two thumbs up and headed to the boat.

Angela made no effort to bid her farewell but lamented, "I hope you can get along without me next week."

Margaret stifled a snicker. "We'll try."

"That's right," added upbeat Connie, "next week the three of us will be partnerless, free agents." She picked up her purse, slid an arm through Angela's, and said as if she were a *really* old lady, "Come, dear, I'll drop you off."

"Bye," said Margaret, "good luck with your 'girls,' Angela."

Angela slit her eyes, sensing the three were up to something, and she wasn't wrong. Connie chuckled and escorted her out the front door.

Margaret stood at the window until Connie's car was cruising down the road. She hurried to the laptop, opened it. Sat down and read, reread, and the third time read aloud the message that had dinged into the *Geezers Go Out* app. It was from 'FishCrazy':

Hello, Lady of the Lake. My name's Bob.

She studied Bob's profile. He looked—nice. Not particularly handsome, but not homely by any stretch. He had a little paunch, but not grossly so, and she sure wasn't perfect. His profile said he was sixty-four. *Hmm, is he too young to consider?* "'Single. No children.' Which means no grandchildren." She mused, "I wouldn't have to convince a slew of relatives to like me."

She continued, "'Non-smoker.' Very good, cannot stand smoking. 'Accountant.' I guess he lives within his means? That's a plus! 'Religion: Prefer not to say.' Hmm." The spiritually non-committalness aspect didn't agree with her. Although she wasn't what she would call 'religious,' she *knew* there was a God. This didn't stop her, she forged ahead. "'Fishing.' Now his profile name makes sense. I wonder if he owns a boat? 'Lives on the lake.' Check, he owns a boat."

She leaned back in the chair and crossed her arms in thought. *Should I?* An anxious but excited smile inched across

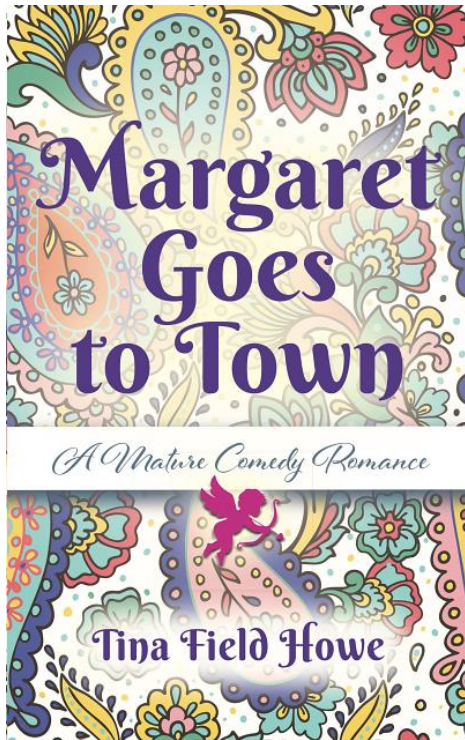
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her face. *Hmm, maybe I won't delete my profile right away...* She clicked 'Reply' and typed:

It's nice to meet you, Bob. My name is

She decided to remain somewhat anonymous and at the end of the sentence typed:

Peggy



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