

# THE FAT OF THE LAND

By Pat Cook

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Ever wonder what really goes on in a health spa? It's probably nothing like what happens at the Thelma Underwood Health Resort. All the ladies here are either trying to date Duncan, the new counselor, or plotting how to get rid of Mr. Loggins, a sinister investor with visions of turning the place into a parking lot. While Nola is devising how to get rid of Loggins, Frances, on the other hand, is busy mugging the cab driver for his Baby Ruth. And just when Duncan makes a play for the secretary, a newspaper reporter shows up to blow the lid off the place.

Ulterior motives, hidden secrets and outrageous situations boil up in this all too human comedy about what some people will do to lose weight. Well, at least they're not eating!

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

While all the patients at the health resort are overweight, none are grotesque and should not be played as such. They are all vital, attractive women with untold energies. Each has about her an air of hidden wishes and dreams, and this life force makes all of them playful, cherubic and, even child-like. They are the very stuff of the human experience; they are all darlings of the author.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

(3 M, 8 W)

**HELGA ABERNATHY:** A professional exercise guru, in her mid-40s. She is extremely fit in both mind and body.

**CELIA WOFFORD:** A perennial patient at the health club, she is in her mid-30s.

**DORIS FUNDERBURK:** Another patient, in her late 30s. She is something of a complainer.

**NOLA BARKER:** Around 30, she is another member and something of a daddy's girl.

**CLEMENTINE PLATT:** In her late 20s, she is another patient and a bit scatterbrained.

**FRANCES MULGREEVY:** A perennial in-and-out patient of the resort. She is in her late 30s.

**AJAX:** A cab driver and the voice of the outside.

**GLYNNIS MONDELLO:** Secretary, bookkeeper and general all-round girl Friday. She is in her early 20s.

**DUNCAN HENNESSEE:** The new biochemist at the resort, he is very charming but something of a wise-cracking bumbler.

**MARGARET FLYNN:** A newspaper reporter in her late 20s. She is ready with a snapshot and snap decision.

**ALVIN FUNDERBURK:** Doris' husband of 18 years. He is a pilgrim in an unholy land.

**EXTRA:** As body in hamper.

**SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY**

**ACT I**

Scene 1: Mid-morning (current day).

Scene 2: Later that afternoon.

Scene 3: The next day.

**ACT II**

Scene 1: The next morning.

Scene 2: The next day.

## **SETTING**

The setting is the lobby and main room of the Thelma Underwood Health Resort. There are two doors and an arch utilized in this floor plan. Front door is located SL, near the checkout desk and leads to the outside. The second door is located SR and leads to the patients' rooms. The arch, located USC, leads to the showers and steam room on one side and another outside door on the other.

The furniture in the room is made up of the usual assortment and looks slightly uncomfortable. There is the checkout desk with desk chair near the front door, on which sits a telephone, a computer and several files. Another chair sits near it. A file cabinet resides behind the desk. There is a row of six chairs near CS facing out. When not in use, these occupy the USL corner of the room. A large couch resides near the USR corner, in front of which is a coffee table. A large blackboard rests DSR near a set of scales.

## **PROPS**

SET: Chalk, eraser and blackboard; scales; clipboard and pen on desk; newspaper in trash can in Act II.

AJAX: Baby Ruth candy bar, umpire's chest protector and a catcher's mask.

FRANCES: coat, purse, necklace, earrings, purse, suitcase.

DUNCAN: suitcase, black-rimmed glasses.

GLYNNIS: first aid kit.

MARGARET: pad, pen, camera.

NOLA: pitcher of tea, glasses, serving tray, packet of powder, legal document.

CLEMENTINE and CELIA: laundry hamper, rope.

**SOUND EFFECTS:** Crash sounds.

**ACT I**  
**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: There is no one in the room. After a medium pause, HELGA sprints through the arch, obviously from the outside track. She jogs to the middle of the room, chanting as she goes.)*

HELGA: Build those muscles, work those engines, build those muscles, work those engines, build those muscles and ... *(SHE stops and takes a deep breath.)* ... rest. Now we limber up as always. I want all of you ... *(SHE looks back and sees she is alone.)* Girls? Where did you get to now? *(SHE jogs back to the arch and looks down the SL hall.)* Let's go, girls! Come on now. That's it! Step lively, build those muscles! *(A loud CRASH is heard offstage.)* OK, don't worry about that, we can pick it up later during our weight lifts. Come on, work those engines, build those ... *(Another CRASH is heard followed by several groans.)* OK, wait. No, don't pick her up. Come on, Doris, get up. That's right, now this way. Let's all jog our way to health and work those ... *(Another CRASH is heard.)* Wait, is she hurt? Nola? No, don't lie down! And ... one and two and one and two...this way. That's right. Come on! That's right. *(Again SHE jogs back into the room and turns to face her students. The first one to follow her in is CELIA who no sooner gets in the room before she falls flat on her face. CLEMENTINE, NOLA and DORIS then enter and stumble over her. All are out of breath and wheezing like some rotted organ bellows. HELGA keeps up the pace.)* Work those engines, build those muscles, one and two and one and two ... *(NOLA staggers over to the chairs, falls to her knees and places her head in a chair. CLEMENTINE falls into another chair and, leans forward, holding her head. DORIS is the only one remaining standing but reaches for the chairs as if she just can't make it any farther.)* There. Now, wasn't that great? *(HER enthusiasm is met with even louder wheezing.)*

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HELGA: *(Cont'd.)* I tell you, we are making wonderful progress. *(The wheezing stops briefly as the MEMBERS of the group valiantly pick up their heads and glare at her. Then, after this they resume their positions and their wheezing.)* We're coming along nicely, much better than yesterday. Don't you feel it? *(SHE faces out and starts the standard side-straddle-hop exercise.)* That's the warmth of good health coursing through your veins, the euphoria of strenuous exercises ...

CELIA: I can't feel my legs.

HELGA: ... The rush of adrenaline pumping IN the fitness and OUT the fatness.

CLEMENTINE: I can't focus, my eyes can't focus.

DORIS: I saw my life pass in front of me! 'Course, it was going faster than me.

CELIA: Somebody help me.

NOLA: What did I run into? *(CLEMENTINE raises her hand.)*

DORIS: Which time?

NOLA: Hurry, I'm about to pass out! *(SHE leans on DORIS.)*

HELGA: Don't stop now. Remember, we must limber up after our laps. Everybody!

CLEMENTINE: I'm seeing the veins in my own eyes! Looks like red lightning!

DORIS: That's your own blood.

CLEMENTINE: I don't want to see my own blood.

DORIS: I want to see HER blood!

CELIA: Can anybody hear me?

HELGA: *(Moves to CELIA.)* Come on, Celia, get up.

*(The OTHERS stumble into sitting positions in the chairs.)*

CELIA: That's the nastiest thing anybody ever said to me.

HELGA: Come on, you can do it.

CELIA: I'll give you ten dollars to let me alone. Hard cash I'm talking here.

HELGA: *(Helps HER up.)* Oh, Celia, that's just your body crying out for protein.

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CELIA: No, it wants a Snickers. Hi, girls. (*SHE waves. Two wave back.*)

HELGA: (*Moves CELIA to a chair.*) Come on, one leg in front of another.

CELIA: Don't tell me, tell them. (*SHE finally falls into a chair.*)

HELGA: Well, at least, you're breathing better. (*Moves to the blackboard.*)

NOLA: That's because I'm breathing through every orifice in my body. (*DORIS, who is sitting next to HER, moves to the next chair.*) I swear, my ears are wheezing.

HELGA: (*Moves to the blackboard.*) OK, let's see just what we're trying to do. (*SHE draws a picture of a heart.*) Let me show you your heart.

CLEMENTINE: Do YOU have it?

DORIS: (*To NOLA.*) Not the heart. She's going to show us the heart.

NOLA: Make her stop.

HELGA: (*Turns back to the OTHERS.*) Would you like to just give up? Those of you who would like to give up right now, raise your hands. (*NOBODY moves.*)

DORIS: You know we can't raise our hands.

CELIA: Even my HAIR is tired.

HELGA: (*Back to the blackboard.*) OK, now here is your heart. Now, what does fat do to your heart?

DORIS: She wants us to think.

CELIA: My brain is tired.

NOLA: I know. I could sure use a nice brisk nap.

HELGA: (*Draws a little coat over the heart.*) It comes along and covers up your heart like a jacket. And then what happens? More fat comes along and covers this like a windbreaker. (*SHE draws a small windbreaker over the jacket.*)

CLEMENTINE: I need cool, it's too hot in here.

HELGA: Just a state of mind, Clementine.

CLEMENTINE: How do you get out of this chicken outfit?

NOLA: Don't say chicken.

DORIS: Isn't there some law against this?

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