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SF PERUSALS

The Flesh Game

A Comedy for Women

Rae Shirley

Samuel French – London
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CHARACTERS

Carol
Judith
Nurse Burton
Rachel
Pauline
Jane
Sandra

The action takes place in the luxurious lounge of a modern Health Resort

Time—the present

During the play the Lights dim to denote a passage of time

Dedicated to all would-be slimmers of whatever age, sex or creed in their efforts to fight the flab, and eschew the ever-present temptations of the flesh.

R.S.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Carol is getting married in a month's time, and wants to lose a stone. She is in her late twenties to early thirties. **Judith** is fortyish, a divorcee, slimming to help her in her search for pastures new. **Nurse Burton** is any age, but oldish if possible. **Rachel** is fortyish, an actress eager to get a part in a television play and trying to slim before her audition. **Pauline:** fiftyish, masculine type, very forthright and dominant. **Jane:** her younger sister, and "little Sir Echo". **Sandra:** any age between thirty and forty, a journalist.

If the actresses are slim, extra curves could be added by using padded underwear. There is the voice of a man, off stage, which could be played by a member of stage management

THE FLESH GAME*

The luxurious lounge of a modern Health Resort

It is morning

The lounge contains comfortable chairs, a couple of small tables and some books. There is an exit UL *which leads to the hall and other parts of the establishment*

As the CURTAIN *rises, Carol and Judith, each wearing a négligé, are sitting determinedly getting through their breakfast, i.e. a glass of tepid water with a slice of lemon floating on top*

Carol I weighed myself this morning, and I've lost one pound, two ounces.

Judith No kidding! What scales did you use?

Carol My bathroom one, of course.

Judith That's faulty. That's why Nurse Burton always uses the big one.

Carol You sure it's faulty?

Judith Something to do with it being on carpet. It's got to be on proper lino to register properly.

Carol I wish you hadn't told me. You weighed yourself today?

Judith Give us a chance. It's not 10 o'clock yet.

Carol The earlier, the better. I always seem to weigh more as the day goes on.

Judith (*holding up the lemon juice contemptuously*) On this diet!

Carol It's true, Judith. Something to do with the atmosphere.

Judith For crying out loud! What's the atmosphere got to do with your weight?

Carol I read it in a book. It definitely said the atmosphere affects your weight. I mean, look what happens to the men when they get to the moon—floating about like rubber dummies all over the place.

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*NB. Paragraph 3 on page ii of this Acting Edition regarding photocopying and video-recording should be carefully read.

Judith That, my sweet, is the law of gravity.

Carol Law of gravity? Never heard of it.

Judith Don't ask me to explain. (*Sipping her drink*) God, this tastes foul! All I know is, it's the force which keeps your two feet on the ground.

Carol I could do with some of that when I'm with Peter.

Judith Sweeps you off your feet, does he?

Carol (*rapturously*) Does he! He's only got to look at me, and I'm on Cloud Nine.

Judith H'mmm . . . you're obviously not married to him!

Carol But I'm going to be—four weeks next Saturday.

Judith Oh?

Carol The fact of the matter is (*confidentially*)—I've bought my wedding dress.

Judith Congratulations!

Carol Size 12, and I'm, well—I'm not size 12, am I?

Judith No, dear. You are not. I can see that without my glasses.

Carol And they wouldn't change it. So here I am. I've got to lose—well, as much as possible.

Judith Why on earth did you buy that size in the first place?

Carol I bought it 6 months ago, only Peter kept putting the wedding date off. Said he wanted promotion first. At the time it was too tight for me, but now! Now I look like a whale fighting to get out of a sardine skin.

Judith I know the feeling.

Carol And you know how persuasive some of those shop assistants can be. (*Affecting a South Kensington drawl*) Madam looks absolutely fantastic in that gown! It was positively made for madam! (*In her own voice*) So, like a fool, I fell for it.

Judith What does Peter say to all this?

Carol Oh, he doesn't know. I'm not that much of a fool.

Judith Where does he think you are now?

Carol I didn't dare tell him I was going to a Health Farm to reduce. So I said I was going on a special cookery course. You know, the genuine Cordon Bleu thing. So that I could make him some wonderful dishes after we're married.

Judith Well, you won't get many ideas here for wonderful dishes, and that's a fact.

Nurse Burton enters all breeze and bonhomie

Nurse Good morning, ladies! And how are we this morning?

Enjoying your lovely breakfast, I see. But where are the others? Surely they haven't finished already?

Judith So far as we know, they haven't even started.

Nurse Haven't even started! Tut, tut. We can't have this kind of thing, can we? Routine and Discipline. These are the Watchwords, the Order of the Day, in the Eldorado Health Farm, and must be maintained at all costs. I repeat, ladies, At All Costs. (*Going into an obviously oft repeated spiel*) We are here to encourage our bodies to ignore the Temptation of Food. Eating is the curse of our western civilization. We are what we eat. If we eat dead food, we are dead from the neck up.

Judith What about the rest of the body—from the neck down? Mine's started to complain bitterly. In fact, I had a rebellion on my hands last night after supper.

Nurse A rebellion on your hands? What do you mean?

Judith I threw up.

Nurse Threw up!

Carol She means she was sick. And so was I.

Judith It was the carrot juice and yoghurt cocktail after the bran mash soufflé that did it.

Nurse (*beaming*) Splendid, splendid! Now that is what I like to hear. It means your body is having a spring-clean, a genuine clearance sale. After years of insulting your bodies with duck and green peas, lamb and mint sauce, and all that rubbish—all Dead Food, don't forget!—now your body is telling you what is good for you.

Judith You could have fooled me! That's not the kind of message my body is getting.

Carol Same here. If it weren't for that wedding dress. . . .

Nurse Don't you see you are giving your poor overworked bodies a complete rest? You must listen to your bodies. Listen, and do what they tell you.

Judith Even when it tells you to be sick!

Nurse (*rapturously*) Above all, when it tells you to be sick!

Rachel enters dresed in a kaftan. She totters in and collapses into a chair, groaning

(*Brightly*) Good morning, Rachel. Have you had your breakfast?

Rachel (*looking at her vaguely*) Who—who are you?

Nurse You know perfectly well who I am, Rachel. I'm Nurse

Burton. I know you're an actress, dear, but we don't want any display of temperament, do we?

Rachel Temperament—with my stomach! Tell me, why am I paying good money for this week of torture. Go on, tell me, tell me.

Nurse Now, now, Rachel. We must not become hysterical. I repeat. Have you had your breakfast?

Rachel (*hollow-voiced*) Breakfast?

Nurse Your lovely glass of lemon water.

Rachel No, I have not had my lovely glass of lemon water. And if I weren't a lady, I'd tell you what to do with it.

Nurse I think she's a little distraught this morning.

Judith She's definitely a little something.

Rachel Shall I tell you what I'd like for breakfast? You won't say yes, but I'll tell you just the same. (*Sitting up, her eyes alight*) I'd like—I'd like—two, no, three rashers of bacon, cooked crisp as crisp. Scrambled eggs, two sausages, and a couple of kidneys for luck. Oh, and two rounds of fried bread. How's that for starters!

Nurse I thought she was hysterical. Now I do believe she's suffering from hallucinations.

Judith You're right. It would be hallucinating to see all that here. Like cool, rippling water in a desert.

Nurse I'm going to get the poor girl a nice glass of lemon water.

Nurse Burton exits

Rachel My head feels like a steel furnace going full blast and my stomach wants to know if my mouth's gone on strike. If only I'd known what it was going to be like, I'd never have come here.

Judith Why did you come here?

Rachel I'm auditioning for a part in a new play on telly. She's supposed to be slim and sylph-like ... you know, like we all were at sweet seventeen. My downfall is chocolate. No damn will power. I've only got to look at a bar of Mars at a checkout, and my knees go to water. So—I thought if I came here for a week ...

Judith Have you lost any weight?

Rachel Two pounds! Two miserable pounds. After hours in the heat treatment room, three mile walk every day, massaged till my bones cry out for mercy, sauna, aerobics, swimming ... you name it, I've had it. They keep telling me to listen to my body. I

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