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Dramatic Publishing

LIFE IN THE FAT LANE

A Play
by
CHERIE BENNETT
Based on her novel



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(LIFE IN THE FAT LANE)

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For Jeff, for always

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“Originally produced by
CINCINNATI PLAYHOUSE IN THE PARK
Edward Stern, Producing Artistic Director
Buzz Ward, Executive Director”

* * * *

Life in the Fat Lane was commissioned by the
Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park through the
generous support of the Lazarus-Macy’s Fund
of the Federated Department Stores Foundation.

The Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park produced the world premiere of LIFE IN THE FAT LANE in March of 2004 with the following artists of the Skilken Brown Touring Company:

CAST

Lara MARIE HOWEY
Molly JODIE BEERMAN
Karen. IRIEMIMEN ONIHA
Mom, Jennie, Female Teen #1, Dr. Uh-huh. . MARY TENSING
Jett, Sgt. Fat Attack MICHAEL MIHM
Perry, Infomercial Queen, Dr. Carb Free, Mr. Sincerity . . .
RANDALL SULLIVAN
Max, Diet Wizard, Allergist, Dr. Nirvana. . . KEVEN KADDI

PRODUCTION STAFF

Producing Artistic Director. EDWARD STERN
Executive Director. BUZZ WARD
Director/Director of Education BERT GOLDSTEIN
Stage Manager. MICHELLE JAZUK
Costume Designer. GEORGE SAROFEEEN
Set Designer NATALIE TAYLOR
Sound Design EUN-JIN CHO
Violin Consultant AMBER BURGESS
Education Intern AMANDA KELLER
Education Associate. ANITA TROTTA

LIFE IN THE FAT LANE

A Play in One Act

For 3m, 4w (with doubling)*—see note following page

CHARACTERS

MAJOR ROLES:

LARA ARDECHE age 16. A “perfect” girl who gains
a lot of weight.

MOLLY SHERIDAN . . age 16. Lara’s chubby best friend.

KAREN O’KEEFE 20s, attractive, so hip she always
wears shades. A teen advice columnist.

MOM (Amy Ardeche) late 30s, Lara’s mom,
thin and attractive, a former beauty queen.
(Doubles as Jennie Smith)

JENNIE SMITH. . . age 16. Very thin, part of the “in” crowd.

JETT ANSTON. age 18. Lara’s hip, handsome,
alt artist boyfriend.

PERRY JAMISON. . . age 16. Molly’s short, funny cousin.

MAX CUTLER age 16. The class clown, cruel.

MINOR ROLES (in order of appearance, played by any
member of the company other than Lara or Karen):

FEMALE TEEN #1

MALE TEEN #1

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

SERGEANT FAT-ATTACK

DIET WIZARD

ALLERGIST

“RICHARD SIMMONS”

DR. CARB-FREE

DR. UH-HUH

DR. NIRVANA

MR. SINCERITY

PRE-RECORDED VOICES:

Principal, TV Announcer, Food Police, Voices, Conductor

***NOTE ON CAST SIZE:** Minimum cast 3m., 4w., with doubling by all but Lara and Karen. Maximum cast 20 or higher with roles gender-flexible. Students can be added to dance and school scenes if needed.

SEE PLAYWRIGHTS NOTES on page 52.

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SPECIAL THANKS: To Ed Stern, Bert Goldstein and everyone at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, especially the terrific cast, stage manager and designers of the world premiere tour.

LIFE IN THE FAT LANE

PRE-SHOW: Upbeat rock music. KAREN O'KEEFE, our narrator, so hip she always wears shades, is seated downstage at a table with a laptop. (Note: KAREN exists in a separate universe, seeing and hearing everything. Unless she enters a scene, other characters hear her only when she answers their letter/e-mail.)

AT RISE: Rock music continues. Various STUDENTS enter, some on cell phones, some hurrying to catch up with a friend or avoid an enemy. They react to, flirt and/or dis each other. As the music ends, the students freeze. LARA ARDECHE, wearing a MISS [NAME OF YOUR CITY] TEEN SPIRIT sash diagonally across her gown, crosses center and "plays" the final bars of a violin concerto beautifully, then bows to enthusiastic applause, and exits. FEMALE TEEN #1 faces the audience. Letters should be read as if memorized.

FEMALE TEEN #1 (reading aloud a letter she's holding).

Hey, Karen! I read your column in the newspaper and I need your advice, fast. There is this guy in my class who is so hot. I am totally in love with him. Sometimes he isn't so nice, like he cheated on his last girlfriend and bragged about it, and he makes fun of geeks. But other times he's great. Anyway, this girl I know told me he

told her that he likes me. I'm not sure if this is true, though, because the girl who told me is kind of a liar. So my question is, how can I find out if this cute guy really likes me? — Crushing

(KAREN finishes typing her answer.)

KAREN. Hey, Crushing! A guy who cheats on his girlfriend and makes fun of people, is, by definition, pond scum, which does not say much for your taste. So he's cute. Big deal. I mean, guppies are cute, too, but they still eat their babies.

(MALE TEEN #1 faces the audience.)

MALE TEEN #1 *(reading aloud)*. Hey, Karen! I think I'm weird. I think about weird things that no one else thinks about. For example, I wonder if I was born into a different family with a different religion would I believe in that religion? Sometimes I worry that my feet stink and everyone is talking about it behind my back but because they're my feet, I can't smell them. *(Beat.)* And sometimes...I wonder how people know if they are gay. I wonder if you can be gay and not know it. I definitely can't ask my parents, so can you help me? — Weird

KAREN *(speaking while typing)*. Hey, Weird! Gay guys are attracted to guys, so if you're not, then you're not. If you are, then maybe you are, or maybe your teen hormones are so all over the place, you could get turned on by...well, pretty much anything. Lots of people worry that if other people knew the stuff they think about, they'd think they are demented. Trust me, most of 'em

are thinking about stuff way weirder than you. Note to the Truly Weird: Please do not bombard me with mail about your weirdness. Thank you.

(MOLLY SHERIDAN faces the audience.)

MOLLY *(reading aloud)*. Hey, Karen! I am a cliché: I'm the funny, chubby best friend of a girl who is perfect. She's a flipping beauty queen, for God's sake!

(The Miss Teen Spirit Pageant. One girl becomes another CONTESTANT. She and LARA hold hands, nervous, as a MASTER OF CEREMONIES opens the envelope.)

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. And Miss [name of state] Teen Spirit is...Lara Ardeche! *(Applause. The MC gives LARA roses and puts the crown on her head. She takes her winning walk across the stage, waving to the crowd as the MC speaks. Into a microphone.)* Sixteen-year-old Lara Lynn Ardeche is a junior honors student at Riverfront High School. An accomplished violinist, she's been selected as a soloist for the Winter State Music Festival. After graduation, Lara plans to study music at Juilliard. Her winning motto: If you believe it, you can achieve it. *(All from pageant scene exit.)*

MOLLY *(continuing her letter)*. We've been best friends since the day I made fart noises when our mean third-grade teacher bent over to get the chalk. Lara laughed louder than anyone else. I've cracked her up for eight years now, during which time she turned into a goddess

and I turned into the Human Blob. How can I hate her when I love her so much? — Confused

KAREN (*in reply*). Hey, Confused! Hate and love are flip sides of the same emotion, and they are definitely not mutually exclusive. One thing you can do is to stop calling yourself “The Human Blob.”

(Lara’s bedroom. MOLLY crosses in with a newspaper, reading KAREN’s reply to LARA, who is doing ab-crunches.)

MOLLY & KAREN. And look at it this way—

MOLLY. “—there’s probably something about you that makes her wildly jealous.” (*To LARA.*) Is there something about me that makes you wildly jealous?

LARA (*counting ab-crunches*). No.

KAREN (*to audience*). Okay, so I don’t always get it right. (*MOLLY tosses the newspaper aside.*)

LARA (*finishing her crunches*). ...fifty. Jealousy is a waste of time. If you want to change something about yourself, believe you can do it. If you believe it, you can achieve it.

(Note: KAREN always addresses the audience unless otherwise indicated.)

KAREN. Kinda makes you want to cross-stitch it on a pillow, doesn’t it?

(JENNIE SMITH enters on the fly.)

JENNIE. Kiss-kiss!

MOLLY. Jennie Smith! And here I was having such a lovely day.

JENNIE (*to LARA, ignoring MOLLY*). Monumental news. Guess who can't go to the dance tonight?

MOLLY. Elvis? Bigfoot?

JENNIE. Denise Reiser! She has chicken pox. Which means you're a shoo-in for Snow Queen!

(LARA absentmindedly scratches her arms as JENNIE checks herself out in the mirror.)

LARA. But I'm only a junior.

JENNIE. Am I getting a zit?

LARA. A junior will never get queen.

JENNIE. Denise was your only real comp. I'm telling you, you're in. Isn't that fantastic?

MOLLY. I just love to profit from others' misfortune, don't you?

JENNIE. So not funny. Why don't you go on a diet? I mean, how can you walk around looking like that? Don't you have any self-respect?

LARA (*gently chastising*). Jennie.

JENNIE. I was only kidding.

KAREN. Note to Teens: When someone says something really mean, followed by, "I was only kidding," they never are.

JENNIE. Anyway, I just wanted to be the one to tell you, the crown is yours. Tell Jett to save a slow dance for me. Gotta fly. (*JENNIE exits.*)

MOLLY. She's such a witch. What really bites my butt is that she's so thin. Which would you rather be, Lar, fat or dead?

LARA (*reaches for a jumbo bag of chips; joking*). Dead.

MOLLY. How come you eat like a horse and slither into a size four, but if I eat a rice cake it ends up on my size fourteen butt?

LARA (*stands before the mirror, assessing herself*). Now everyone will expect me to win. But what if I don't?

MOLLY. Maybe I could get a mild case of anorexia. Just until I lost thirty pounds. Then I'd, like, snap out of it.

LARA. Let's not tell my mom about Denise having chicken pox. I don't want to get her hopes up.

MOLLY. You've got more crowns than the queen of England. How can you get flipped out about Snow Queen? (*MOLLY joins LARA at the mirror.*)

LARA. I like to do my best. And my mom was—

MOLLY. Snow Queen, I know all about it. It's just so deeply lame. (*Beat, as she takes in their mutual reflections.*) I hate standing next to you.

LARA. Let's put your hair up for tonight. (*LARA gets a brush to do MOLLY's hair.*)

MOLLY. What if I end up as fat as my mother?

LARA. You have to admit, it's weird she's a therapist and can't even control her own weight.

MOLLY. She does aerobics, she's totally healthy. She says she's happy just the way she is.

LARA. She should lose weight for your dad, then.

MOLLY. Yesterday, he tore Carmen Electra's picture out of a *Maxim* and put it up on the fridge, glued on my mom's head, and left a Post-it note that said: "Carol—this is to inspire you to lose weight. Love, Allen."

LARA. Mortifying!

MOLLY. So my mom found one of Tom Cruise and pasted my dad's face on it, drew a noose around his neck, and

left a note that said: “Allen—this is to inspire you to drop dead.”

LARA (*laughing*). Get out!

MOLLY. Just my mom’s warped sense of humor. They like each other. Not like your parents who make out in the kitchen, of course.

LARA. My parents are still madly in love.

MOLLY. That’s what’s going to happen with you and Jett. It’s so depressing. You’ll be at Homecoming with the hottest guy on the planet and I’ll be with my cousin, Perry who—lucky me—just moved here from Michigan.

LARA. Is he cute?

MOLLY. Please.

LARA. Nice?

MOLLY. Lemme put it this way. The last time I saw him—three years ago—he played “Happy Birthday, Dear Gramma” on the kazoo.

LARA. Well, you can dance with Jett, then.

KAREN. Let’s face it, it sucks to be at prom with your cousin Kazoo Boy when your best friend is with the guy you secretly love.

MOLLY (*feigning blasé*). Yeah, sure, whatever.

KAREN. And it sucks even more to dance with the guy you secretly love while pretending he’s just another guy.

LARA. Promise you’ll try to have fun? Please? (*LARA offers MOLLY her pinkie finger.*)

KAREN. I never get involved in the lives of the kids who e-mail me, so beyond a witty reply, I never expected to get involved in Molly and Lara’s. (*MOLLY relents and hooks pinkies with LARA. They hug. LARA exits.*) Note to Self: Never say never. (*MOLLY tries on one of LARA’s crowns and regards herself in the mirror.*)

MOLLY. My dream is to look like I could win one of these, but be way too cool to want to.

(SERGEANT FAT-ATTACK does a military entrance and confronts MOLLY.)

SERGEANT FAT-ATTACK *(delivered like a drill sergeant)*. Listen up, you blimpie bag of blubber! Fat is not fit, fat is not fine and fat—is—not—ACCEPTABLE. You are a disgrace to God and country. *(He turns to confront the audience.)* This is Armageddon, people. Failure to fight fat will result in heart disease, diabetes and death. Now get out there, you losers...and lose.

(He salutes and does a military exit. Party sounds, dance music, excited voices take us to the school dance.)

PRINCIPAL *(voice-over)*. And this year's Snow Queen is...Lara Ardeche!

KAREN. Like you didn't see that coming.

(The dance. LARA slow dances with fine boyfriend, JETT; JENNY dances nearby with MAX. Apart from them, MOLLY endures her short cousin, PERRY.)

JENNIE *(to LARA)*. You two make the greatest couple.

LARA. Thanks, Jennie, that's so sweet.

MAX *(notices someone offstage)*. Check out Fatty Patty!

Over there with Bruce Bynor.

JENNIE. Brucie-Boy? Figures.

MAX (*gives a limp-wristed wave and calls to them in a lisping falsetto*). Brucie, sweetie! Are we having a gay old time?

JETT. Oh, that's original.

MAX. Lighten up, dude. I'm only kidding. (*Calling off-stage.*) Yo, Patty! You're so hot!

LARA. You guys, be nice.

(PERRY, dazzled by LARA, crosses and taps her on the shoulder, then pulls a kazoo out of his back pocket and does a "wolf whistle.")

PERRY. Dance?

KAREN. Note to the Lovestruck: The kazoo does not get you the girl.

LARA. Thanks for asking. Later, okay?

(MAX gets on his knees and shuffles over to LARA, imitating PERRY. He mimes a "wolf whistle" on a kazoo.)

MAX. Dance? (*MAX rejoins his friends. Everyone but JETT and LARA laughs. PERRY skulks back to MOLLY.*)

PERRY. Max is quite the jerk.

MOLLY. Hel-lo. Kazoo?

PERRY. Okay so in a moment of insecurity I panicked and retrogressed to my younger, dumber self. I happen to be a great guy. Flawed, but great. Be sure to tell her that.

MOLLY. In case you didn't notice, she's already got the world's coolest boyfriend.

PERRY (*a realization*). And you've got a thing for him!

MOLLY (*flustered by the truth*). I don't have a "thing."

MAX (*watches Patty dancing offstage*). Oh no, Fatty Patty's dancing! EARTHQUAKE!! (*MAX shakes all over, pretends to lose his balance and falls to the floor in a "fit."*) JETT dances LARA away from MAX.)

JETT. There's only so much of that bozo I can take.

LARA. No one pays any attention to him. (*They dance a beat.*) I used to dream about being Snow Queen.

JETT. Was it like this?

LARA. Minus Max. I know you think it's shallow and superficial—

JETT. Hey, I like being the one to make your dreams come true. (*They continue dancing as KAREN speaks.*)

KAREN. Yeah, he really said that. But he pulled it off. I mean, look at him. He had this heat. Girls, you know what I mean. Plus, he's an artist, like his mom. Her paintings sell for a small fortune.

JETT. Sometimes I wish I was a musician. Or a tennis player. Anything but an artist.

LARA. Because you're afraid you'll be compared to your mom?

JETT. Because I *know* I'll be compared to my mom. What if all I ever am is famous artist Marsha Anston's son?

LARA. Someday, she'll be known as famous artist Jett Anston's mother.

(They hug. All from the dance exit except LARA, who crosses into her bedroom. AMY ARDECHE, LARA'S MOM enters. LARA hands MOM her crown. MOM tries it on and admires her reflection in the mirror as LARA goes behind a screen to change out of her gown.)

MOM (*calling to LARA*). Snow Queen. Your dad and I are so proud of you, honey.

LARA (*calling back to MOM*). Thanks, Mom. I'm sorry Daddy didn't make it home.

MOM. His trial in Chicago is running long. It seems like yesterday that I was queen. Your father was the best-looking boy there. I am so lucky. I have the best husband and the best daughter in the whole, wide world.

(LARA comes from behind the screen wearing attractive, fitted, casual clothes. She scratches her arms absent-mindedly.)

LARA. That's so sweet, Mom.

MOM (*examines LARA's arms*). Let me see. Oh, Lara, the hives again.

LARA. Don't say it like it's my fault.

MOM. It's just very unattractive, sweetheart.

KAREN. The itchy, red hives had started a couple of weeks earlier. Lara's mom took her to an allergist, who tried various drugs, but nothing worked. Tests didn't reveal what she was allergic to. When her eyes swelled shut, she was put on prednisone. Which worked. But it also made Lara gain some weight. She looked exactly the same, but still. She knew.

(As KAREN speaks, LARA crosses to the scale. She weighs 128. DIET WIZARD, manic, enters with a blender and the ingredients below.)

DIET WIZARD. Do you want health, energy, weight loss? Raw food, my friends, is the answer! *(He throws the fol-*

lowing ingredients into a blender.) Soy powder, carrots, beets and yeast in The Diet Wizard Blender— (He turns on the blender.) —and voilà! Mmmm, that’s one great shake!

(He sticks a straw in it and hands it to LARA as he exits. She sips it as MOLLY and JETT enter with school books.)

MOLLY *(in the middle of a conversation with JETT)*. I swear, Kushner thinks calculus is like the Holy Grail— LARA *(embarrassed, tries to hide the drink)*. Oh hi, you guys are early.

MOLLY *(re the drink)*. What the heck is that?

LARA. Oh nothing, just a...snack.

MOLLY *(tastes it and gags)*. Gimme a break, this tastes like puke!

LARA. Okay, I might be...on a diet.

JETT *(laughing it off)*. That’s funny. Where are the calc notes?

MOLLY *(crosses to go get snacks)*. Cookies? Caramel corn?

JETT. Caramel corn, definitely. Lar?

LARA. Nothing, thanks. *(MOLLY exits. LARA sips her drink.)*

JETT. You don’t need to diet, Lar. You eat like a truck driver. I’ve always loved that about you.

LARA. You wouldn’t love it so much if I got fat.

JETT. I didn’t fall for you because you’re thin. Besides, why should you have to conform to some arbitrary standard of how other people think you should look?

LARA. So you’re telling me you could be attracted to a girl who looks like, say, Molly?

JETT. Sure, why not? (*JETT exits with LARA's diet drink.*)

KAREN. Lara wasn't convinced. She loved Molly. But in her opinion, no one had to be overweight. They could work out, or diet. Unless they were lazy, or had no self-control, or both. That certainly didn't apply to Lara.

(*LARA crosses to the scale. 136. The Allergist's examining room. LARA waits with her MOM.*)

MOM. Listen, honey, I'm going to help you with your diet. I know every trick in the book.

LARA. I don't need tricks. It's just a matter of will power.

(*The ALLERGIST enters.*)

ALLERGIST. So, Miss Ardeche. How're the allergies?

LARA (*timid*). Fine. But I think the prednisone is making me fat.

ALLERGIST (*checking LARA's chart*). You've gained... what...

MOM. Eighteen pounds in two months.

LARA. You said I might retain water, but—

MOM. My daughter is not retaining eighteen pounds of water.

ALLERGIST. Prednisone causes some people to store fat. Also, patients report it makes them hungry, which can lead to a significant weight gain.

LARA (*covering anger with beauty-pageant sweetness*). You didn't mention that before.

MOM. There must be some other drug for—

ALLERGIST. We tried everything. Nothing worked until the prednisone. (*To LARA.*) Hopefully you'll grow out of this. Many young people do.

LARA. You don't understand. I can't be this fat. I *can't!*

ALLERGIST. The teen years can be very tough. There's a lot of pressure on you. Let's try you on Paxil and see if it helps. (*He writes a prescription and hands it to MOM. LARA sees it as a lifeline.*)

LARA. So I can stop taking prednisone?

ALLERGIST. Absolutely not. But Paxil should help with your anxiety.

LARA (*sweetly*). I really think I'm only anxious because I've gained—

ALLERGIST. I'd like to see you again in a month. We'll see how things are shaping up. Try not to worry so much, Miss Ardeche. (*The ALLERGIST and MOM exit.*)

KAREN. That was pretty much like telling her not to breathe.

(Lara's bedroom. LARA crosses in and begins exercising. MOLLY enters, watching TV.)

UNCTUOUS TV ANNOUNCER (*voice-over*). Imagine losing all the weight without dangerous medications or strenuous exercise! Here's the miracle you've been waiting for—the Skinny Strip! Doctors in Europe have seen as much as thirty-five pounds lost in one month! Now, with this risk-free offer, you can try it right here in America!

MOLLY. I'm getting it.

LARA. It's a scam, Mol.

UNCTUOUS TV ANNOUNCER (*voice-over*). No, it's not a scam, it's the answer to your prayers!

MOLLY. But if it works, I could be thin in a month. So could you. My mom would kill me, though. Can I have it sent here?

LARA (*stops exercising*). Sure. (*Beat.*) I wanted to ask you...I'm going over to Jett's.

PLAYWRIGHT’S NOTES:

These are discretionary suggestions.

SET: Most scenes are short and flow one into another; the set might be very simple, divided into multi-use playing areas.

A small curtain might be used as a separate entrance for the weight-loss “experts.” This gives a vaudeville feel and differentiates them from the “real” characters’ entrances.

Since mirrors, and the consciousness of self reflected in mirrors, is a major theme, mirrors might play a part in the set design. “Fun house” can be used to make characters look fatter or thinner.

COSTUMES: The Weight Gain – For the world premiere, two realistic fat suits were built for Lara, so that we saw her weight gain as the play progressed. Another option is to handle weight in the abstract—when Lara stands in front of a “fat” fun-house mirror, she sees herself as fat. A third option is to dress the actress in increasingly baggier clothes.

The weight-loss “experts” should be costumed comically, to differentiate them from the realistic characters.

STAGING: I suggest that Karen already be on stage, answering e-mails on her laptop, as the audience enters.

She should remain on stage throughout, until she exits from the coffeehouse scene.

STYLE: All the weight-loss “experts” should be performed as over-the-top caricatures. This does NOT include the Allergist and Dr. Uh-Huh, who should be performed realistically.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: If the actress cast as Lara plays an instrument well, the performances in the script can be live. Any musical instrument will work as long as the selections she plays are classical.

If the actress does not play, pre-recorded violin with the actress pretending to play worked well in the world premiere.