

EXCEEDING THE PURCHASABLE CALORIES

By Rhea MacCallum

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SYNOPSIS: In a quest for comfort food one woman discovers the importance of reading the fine print.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 2 either)

WOMAN (f).....mid 20s and up, any race, disheveled,
inside and out. *(42 lines)*

CLERK (m/f) 18 and up, any race, dreams of working
anywhere but here. *(26 lines)*

MANAGER (m/f).....mid 20s and up, any race, cares about
customer service. *(30 lines)*

TIME: Late evening

SETTING: NFA Health Mart

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Premiered as part of Colonial Quickies produced at the Colonial Playhouse in Aldan, PA, June 2017. Originally developed by PlayGround-LA, Jim Kleinmann – Artistic Director.

March 2017 staged reading cast: Alison Minami as Woman, Carla Vega as Clerk, Anthony Rutowicz as Manager. Directed by Frieda de Lackner.

Playground-LA's 2017 'Best Of' Gala staged reading cast: Carla Vega as Woman; Christina Wren as Clerk; Danny Katz as Manager. Directed by Jim Kleinmann.

AT START: *WOMAN* carrying a red shopping basket approaches *CLERK* at checkout counter.

CLERK: Welcome to NFA Health Mart. Did you find everything you needed today?

WOMAN: Yes, thank you.

CLERK: Awesome. Do you have your shopping card?

WOMAN hands the card to *CLERK*.

CLERK: Thank you. (*Runs card.*) Okay.

CLERK hands *WOMAN* the card back and starts scanning items. *SFX:* beep as each item is scanned.

CLERK: Extra wavy potato chips. Are they really extra wavy? Double chocolate chip ice cream... sounds decadent. A little white wine, nice. Bag of powdered donut gems.

SFX: buzzer.

CLERK: Oh no.

WOMAN: What's wrong?

CLERK: I can't let you buy all of this. Something needs to go back.

WOMAN: Excuse me.

CLERK: What would you like to put back... the ice cream? Donuts?

WOMAN: What are you talking about? I have the money to cover everything.

CLERK: Oh no, that's not the issue. The problem is your items exceed your purchasable calories for the month.

WOMAN: What are you talking about?

CLERK: Yeah, see, here at the No Fatties Allowed Health Mart—

WOMAN: No Fatties Allowed?!

CLERK: That's what the NFA stands for and here at NFA you're only allowed to purchase foods that total 60,000 calories a month per adult or child over the age of twelve living at your residence. That averages to 2000 calories per day, which is actually quite generous considering how often the average patron consumes calories from outside untrackable sources.

WOMAN: You... you're keeping track of how many calories I purchase?

CLERK: When Big Pharma purchased our chain they established a new customer service agreement for our shopper's cards. You did fill out and sign the new agreement form about a month ago.

WOMAN: Sure, but I don't remember seeing anything about "purchasable calories."

CLERK: Did you actually read the agreement?

WOMAN: No, but—

CLERK: Well, it's in there and it appears you've reached your max for the month. So... you want to put the donuts back?

WOMAN: No, no, I don't. This is ridiculous. Do you have a manager I can speak to?

CLERK looks around, waves the MANAGER over, who enters holding a tablet.

MANAGER: Welcome to NFA Health Mart, how can I assist you today?

CLERK: We have another calorie situation.

MANAGER: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

WOMAN: I've been shopping at this market for years. I've never heard of "purchasable calories." I just want to buy my groceries and go home.

MANAGER: I understand. Our new owners have implemented a policy that doesn't fit your purchasing habits. Let me see if there's something I can do. Can I see your shopper's card?

WOMAN hands her card to the MANAGER who scans it on the tablet.

MANAGER: Okay, great. I see you have a gym membership. We can add calories to your total based on your gym activity... that usually makes a big difference. Ummm... according to your gym your last workout was two and a half years ago? Does that sound right?

WOMAN: Maybe.

CLERK: Oh, that's terrible.

WOMAN: Excuse me.

CLERK: Sorry, it's just, well, besides wasting your money it means no change to your purchasable calories.

MANAGER: That's true.... Oh, you purchased a Fit Bit last December—

WOMAN: Yeah...?

MANAGER: —but haven't registered it yet. If you could do that we might be able to increase your purchasable calories based on your activity.

WOMAN: It was a Christmas present for my sister.

MANAGER: I see.

WOMAN: Wait, what if I were having dinner guests over? These purchasable calories don't account for that.

CLERK: You aren't really serving dinner guests chips, donuts and ice cream.

WOMAN: I could if I wanted to.

MANAGER: We do have a Special Event request form but it needs to be submitted at least seven days in advance with a list of guests expected to be in attendance along with the desired menu and reason for the gathering. If approved, you'll be allotted additional purchasable calories.

WOMAN: If approved?!

MANAGER: You agreed to the terms of service when you signed the membership form.

WOMAN: Yes, but I didn't read them.

CLERK: You should really read anything your sign your name to.

WOMAN: Whoever heard of purchasable calories? I mean, tracking what I buy to send me coupon offers, that's what I thought you people did.

MANAGER: Just to confirm, you're the sole resident of your household?

WOMAN: Maybe. Maybe not. What if there was someone living with me? Would you increase my calories then?

MANAGER: They would have to be a dependent, otherwise they'd need to sign up for their own card.

WOMAN: Well, I have a son.

CLERK: Do you?

WOMAN: Yes, he's fourteen.

MANAGER: Okay, great. (*Types into tablet.*) His name?

WOMAN: Do you really need that?

MANAGER nods with a smile.

WOMAN: Timmy.

MANAGER: Date of birth.

WOMAN: Seriously?

MANAGER: Wait. According to your tax records you haven't filed anyone as a dependent in the last seven years.

WOMAN: You have access to my tax records!

CLERK: Fine print, ma'am, you really do need to read the fine print.

WOMAN: Shut it down.

MANAGER: What?

WOMAN: Close my account.

MANAGER: We can't do that ma'am.

WOMAN: What do you mean you can't do that?

CLERK: Also, in the fine print.

MANAGER: Once you open an account with NFA Health Mart there is a permanent record, there's no closing it.

WOMAN: Well, can I make my purchases without using the card and just pay full price?

MANAGER: I'm afraid not.

CLERK: Our new registers won't ring up purchases without first scanning a shopper's card.

WOMAN: You mean there's no way to work around this?

CLERK: Time to put back the donuts?

WOMAN: No. This isn't right. I should be allowed to buy whatever I want to buy.

MANAGER: Chips, wine, ice cream, donuts... are you in emotional distress?

WOMAN: Yes!

MANAGER: Why didn't you say so? What is the cause of your distress?

WOMAN: This. This right here.

MANAGER: Oh, no, I meant death in the family.

CLERK: Bad break up.

MANAGER: Were you carjacked?

CLERK: In an accident?

MANAGER: Lost your job.

WOMAN: Bad break up. Yes, that one. I'm getting over a bad break up.

MANAGER: Great! I mean, sorry, let me just... would this be the break up with Trevor you're referring to?

WOMAN: Yes?

MANAGER: According to your Facebook posts that relationship ended almost three years ago.

WOMAN: Yeah...?

MANAGER: The thing is, the calorie increase for emotional distress can only be applied during the first six weeks since the triggering event.

WOMAN: You've got to be kidding me. What if I just had a crap filled day? What about that? Maybe I started my day by stepping on cat puke and followed that up by stubbing my big toe on my coffee table causing the nail to nearly come completely off. Then I missed my train to work, showed up late and, of course, it turned out to be a performance review day so my boss, my bosses boss and my bosses bosses boss all watched me hobble my way into the office and just when I thought I couldn't be any more embarrassing I look down and realize that the buttons on my blouse aren't matching up and there's this huge gap where anyone with eyes can see my bra and naturally I'm wearing the backup, dingy, should have thrown it out three years ago bra. You ever try to re-button your blouse while trying to avoid being caught doing it? Impossible. Then during my performance review I realize no one on the panel of my supervisors will look me in the eye and I think maybe it's just me, maybe I'm being paranoid, I mean, I'm decent looking. Why will no one look me in the eye, I wonder, and when I leave the room I hear them erupt into laughter so I go to the bathroom to go cry in the third stall

and that's when I see this dry crusted huge snot wad just hanging at the edge of my nostril, just dangling there as if suspended in air. Then I spend the whole day paranoid that every snicker, every sideways glance is about what a train wreck of a person I've become and I just want it all to stop. So yeah, maybe chips and wine and ice cream and donuts is not the greatest thing I could do for myself right now, but it's what I need to help me forget this disastrous day. Maybe it's all crap that I would be better off without, but right now it's all I have to stop me from wanting to die. These are the things that make my life tolerable.

MANAGER: Let me see if I can figure out a work around.

WOMAN: Yes, please.

CLERK: Powdered donuts are my favorite, too.

MANAGER: Our parent company is currently testing a new, experimental diet pill and according to your medical records you'd be a perfect candidate. If you're willing to participate I can waive the purchasable calories for the duration of the trial.

WOMAN: A diet pill?

MANAGER: It's all I got.

WOMAN: And I can leave with my groceries?

MANAGER: Absolutely. I'll just need to get your signature, here.
(Handing WOMAN the tablet for her electronic signature.)

Lights out.

THE END