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Product Code: A0873-SP

What Comes After?

A 10-Minute Play by
Susan Surman

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What Comes After?

by Susan Surman

CHARACTERS

1F / 1M

BRENDA: *Engagement broken off, her aloneness gets her out to the park with one thing in mind. She meets Josh, another jogger and they go back to her apartment.*

JOSH: *Having been dumped by his girlfriend, his loneliness gets him jogging in the park where he meets Brenda.*

SETTING

Brenda's apartment; a bed or couch will suffice.

TIME

The present; mid-morning, late spring or early summer.

What Comes After?

by Susan Surman

AT RISE: *BRENDA and JOSH are heaving about on the bed (or couch), both in jogging gear. Breathless at first through the dialogue until they stop heaving.*

JOSH

You're insatiable, Bonnie.

BRENDA

Brenda.

JOSH

Don't you need a coffee break? De-caffeinated green tea? Maybe a muffin top.

BRENDA

You're so sexy.

JOSH

I'm not a machine.

BRENDA

This is the real me.

JOSH

The real me used to be Josh Roberts. I feel so weak I can't breathe.

BRENDA

I'll breathe for both of us.

JOSH

Are you a widow?

BRENDA

Never married.

JOSH

What then?

BRENDA

Six weeks. A broken engagement. You?

JOSH

Not anything.

BRENDA

How long?

JOSH

Five months.

BRENDA

Come on, Jack, let's do it.

JOSH

Josh. Not so fast. There are guys who died doing it

BRENDA

You're crazy.

JOSH

That actor John somebody.

BRENDA

John Garfield. I loved him. Remember that movie with Joan Crawford? He played the violin and she killed herself. I WANT TO LIVE.

JOSH

I want to rest. God, what am I doing with this sex maniac I just met? Listen, I got nothing left. Do what you want. Just don't tell me. (*Goes limp and lays back*)

BRENDA

Maybe we should have talked first. Maybe get to know each other a little. (*Goes limp and lays back*) Is this what it's going to be like?

JOSH

What?

BRENDA

Being single. Being out there.

JOSH

It isn't going to be easy. You were together a long time?

BRENDA

Nearly three years.

JOSH

I'm your first since the split?

BRENDA

You can tell?

JOSH

You're lucky it's me. Don't ask me why I know that. I just do. Because of the kind of guy I am. Maybe the reason you met me is because I can pass on what I know.

BRENDA

How did you do it? How do you do it? Just asking. Not being nosy. Yes, I am.

HE is silent, trying to remember something.

BRENDA

I hit a nerve. You don't have to say anything.

JOSH

No, it's okay. I don't mind. I was just trying to find the right way to say it without sounding I don't know – preachy. Okay. Day two was my absolute worst. We'd been together two and a half years. Lived together for a year. Day one, I stayed in bed. Slept twelve hours straight. So day two, I go into the kitchen for breakfast like I always did. But I didn't have a clue. Instant coffee. I knew how to do that. I swear, I thought she was going to walk in any minute. I thought it was a bad dream. Are you sure you really want to hear all this? I mean, you've got your own baggage.

BRENDA

Yes, I want to hear it. From the man's point of view. I've talked to a few women, but they see it one way and men see it another way.

JOSH

It was perfect. So I thought. *(Stops talking)*

BRENDA

So what happened?

JOSH

One morning, we were at the kitchen table eating French toast with powdered sugar and Cinnamon, just the way I like it. She was a great cook. I was happy, drinking my coffee, thinking how lucky I was to have her. And out of the blue, she said she wanted out. No explanation, no reason, nothing. "I don't want to do this anymore."

BRENDA

Maybe she meant cooking. I don't cook. I mean I do, I'm just not very good.

JOSH

That's what I thought. So like an idiot, I say, okay, I can eat cereal. But the look on her face said it wasn't about food. Just like that. Exact words: "I don't want to do this anymore." Those were her exact words.

BRENDA

Did she want to get married? Was it that?

JOSH

We never talked about it. If that's what she was thinking, I didn't know. I thought we were happy like it was. The sex was great. Oh...sorry. We had just moved into this fantastic house. A house. Before that, a small apartment.

BRENDA

It had to be rough.

JOSH

You can't imagine. Then it hit me. Finally. Any woman who leaves me isn't good enough. The hell with her, I said. And I meant it.

BRENDA

Our situation was different. We both agreed on the split. No one just walked away. So then what?

JOSH

Then I went wild. Lots of women. I even took dance lessons. She always told me I was clumsy. I met lots of nice people, but I felt empty. That's when I knew.

BRENDA

I don't understand. Knew what?

JOSH

I was ready to be by myself. That's when I started jogging and recently, I got into a Body Flow class. Kind of a combination of Tai Chi, Pilates, and yoga.

BRENDA

Exercise helps. And dark chocolate.

JOSH

What about you? I talked enough.

BRENDA

I was getting terrible backaches. Blamed it on sitting at the computer. The x-rays found nothing, but still the pain never went away. No one tied it up to my emotional state. The fact that my fiancée stopped touching me. The intimacy had totally gone. The struggle to look the other way, pretending it was just a glitch, caused even more pain. His mother blamed me because her son needed someone to complete him. I was the selfish one. Crap

BRENDA, *Continued*

like that. My mother wasn't too happy, either. It was a mutual agreement to end it. But you know what mothers can be like.

JOSH

That was a good diagnosis to realize your body pain was emotional.

BRENDA

Doctors want to give you drugs. I didn't need drugs.

JOSH

So the physical side was non-existent. So...this. Us. Picking up men in the park.

BRENDA

I never did this before with anyone, Josh. I swear. Do you believe me? If you must know, it's the first time I started jogging in the park.

JOSH

I thought I'd never seen you there before. Me neither. Going home with someone I just met.

BRENDA

Really? You're so attractive.

JOSH

Never.

BRENDA

I believe you. Do you believe me?

JOSH

Yes.

BRENDA

We stayed together pretending everything was okay. Actually, that's not true. We knew but we weren't ready to make the break. We even went to a sex therapist. That was a waste of time. He was psycho.

JOSH

It isn't sex that breaks up a relationship. It's dried up conversation.

BRENDA

I never heard that before. That's pretty profound. But you know, our dialogue had all but dwindled. I felt like I was encased in ice. An ice sculpture. A cold, hard, block of ice and the iceman didn't cometh. Eventually, we had to face it. He stayed in the apartment. It was big and I wouldn't be able to afford it. So I moved here. I guess we had a good run. It's

BRENDA, *Continued*

terrible to say we had a good run. It's supposed to be forever, isn't it? With one person? Isn't that what they teach us?

JOSH

Fairy tales. What do you do? Do you have a job?

BRENDA

I was a communications major. I'm a playwright. I'm also writing a novel. I can do that. Write two different genre pieces at the same time.

JOSH

It's a lonely life. I have a cousin in Hollywood who's a writer. She was miserable. Then she got a part-time job in an upscale boutique, met a man who swept her off her feet. They got married. His fourth. She still writes. He cheats on her, but she's not lonely. She says.

BRENDA

Hooray for Hollywood.

JOSH

You need people. We all do. You need a job. If you don't need money, volunteer. You can still write.

BRENDA

Life was simple. Ben went to the office. Ben came home. We ate. We watched TV. We went to bed. On weekends, we saw our friends. We had money for anything we wanted. We were living the American Dream. Looking forward to marriage, to children.

JOSH

You mean, the American Myth. It's never as simple as it seems.

BRENDA

Will I ever sleep again? I sleep for four hours. Up for four. Down for four. I'm exhausted.

JOSH

A roller coaster. I went through that. You'll sleep again. Too soon to try for a relationship. You need to heal first. And you never know. You might like going it solo. You'll learn about yourself. Give it time.

BRENDA

You and I have talked more about real stuff in this short time than me and Ben did in months.

JOSH

I learned. I never talked. We never talked. I thought she was supposed to know. And the same for her I guess. I knew nothing.

Josh? BRENDA

What? JOSH

What are you doing the rest of your life? BRENDA

I can't save you, Brenda. JOSH

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Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes