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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.
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

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)

So what happened?

BRENDA

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
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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.
BRENDA

Josh?

What?

BRENDA

What are you doing the rest of your life?

JOSH

I can’t save you, Brenda.

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes