

# AFTER EROS



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**AFTER EROS**

CHARACTERS

DANNY

LAURA

SCENE:     A bar

[SPOT ON LAURA]

LAURA

I had a vaginal wart burn off twelve years ago. I took an AIDS test. Negative. I had abortion after my IUD grew into the walls of my uterus. I get cold sores in my mouth now and then but I've never had herpes. I'm prone to urinary tract infections which can make me completely irrational during treatment. I usually get them every time I have a new lover. That's it in a nut shell. Will you make love to me now?

[LAURA SITS AT TABLE. SPOT ON DANNY]

DANNY

I'm torn between the comforts of companionship and that crazy biochemistry. I like the stability of a relationship but eventually, I miss the rapture. I like feeling loved but eventually I miss the conquest. I like intimacy but eventually I miss the thrill of the unknown. I want it all. Am I asking too much?

[LIGHTS UP ON LAURA AT TABLE WITH DRINKS]

DANNY

Who do you think said, "Despite my 50 years of research into the feminine soul, I have not yet been able to answer the great question that has never been answered: What does a woman want?"

LAURA

Even Freud wasn't perfect.

DANNY

Got an answer?

LAURA

Yes, Danny boy, I do. I know exactly what I want. And you? What do you want?

DANNY

I'm getting what I want.

LAURA

Which is?

DANNY

Comfort, affection, someone to share with, someone to explore the inner and outer dimensions of lust.

LAURA

Please don't confuse the issue.

DANNY

I thought I was clearing it up.

LAURA

I want you. I want a life with you. You and me.

DANNY

I know.

LAURA

Go ahead. Say it.

DANNY

What?

LAURA

I love you but I'm not in love with you. Or how about, why don't we just be friends with benefits?

DANNY

I don't do duck-billed platitudes. I know you want me to say something but I'm not good at expressing these things.

LAURA

Nobody is. I admit, I'm a romantic -- blind insane love, cheeks sore from grinning all the time, motion sickness from the continuous replays of those special moments -- it's great for a while, but, my God, it's exhausting.

DANNY

Learn to compartmentalize. Finished?

LAURA

I should be. You're either on the boat moving with what's current or you're a castaway reliving the past and placing demands on the future. End of lecture.

DANNY

Why do we have to get so intense? We've had a good time so far.

LAURA

The elevator brought us to this level of relating.

DANNY

I wish you'd stop doing that.

LAURA

What?

DANNY

Hiding behind metaphors.

LAURA

Hiding? Who's exposed here? Besides, metaphors seem to give a larger picture under the circumstances, don't you think?

DANNY

Metaphors are ways of expressing thoughts not feelings. Guess who taught me that. What's your hurry?

LAURA

Hurry?

DANNY

It won't happen just because you've decided it's time.

LAURA

I know.

DANNY

Do you? [SILENCE] You're beautiful when you run out of words.

LAURA

Bastard.

DANNY

Do you know why? You've got an uncanny ability to be right most of the time. I love that part of you too. But sometimes it's too much. When you're quiet and fully responsive to whatever is around you, I see the vulnerable little girl who wants someone to listen to her, to take care of her.

LAURA

You love little girls?

DANNY

Spell is broken.

LAURA

I'm one of the most independent people I know. I don't need anyone to take care of me.

DANNY

Not what I meant and you know it.

LAURA

You refuse to take me seriously.

DANNY

You're wrong to assume that pushing will bring us closer together. It won't. Like I asked before, what's your hurry?

LAURA

I hate being single.

DANNY

Terrific.

LAURA

I've given up the fairy tale and now I want to settle into reality. I want you to be a part of that reality.

DANNY

Why?

LAURA

Because I love you.

DANNY

As much as you hate being single?

LAURA

You're chicken shit who is threatened because I know what I want.

DANNY

You're the one with the choice, not me.

LAURA

Choice?

DANNY

[HE RISES] Between getting closer or rising above it all.

LAURA

Where are you going? You know I can't stand unfinished business.

DANNY

I came here to unwind. I can't do this right now.

LAURA

Chicken shit.

DANNY

Save the self-righteous spoiled brat number for another time. I've had enough for one day.

LAURA

Now it's dump and run.

DANNY

If we stop now, maybe we could avoid loading each other down with all the petty grievances we've so nicely harbored.

LAURA

There's more?

DANNY

You'll have to use your independent way of dealing with this.

LAURA

I hate it when you run away, especially from me.

DANNY

I know, but I can't do any more relationship analysis -- it's anal. Later. Ball's in my court and I'll serve when I'm ready.

LAURA

When can I expect service?

DANNY

Damn it, Laura. Enough. You've already proven you're quick witted and clever. I can barely keep up with you on my best days which this isn't.

LAURA

I care about you, Danny, but I work best with a deadline.

DANNY

A month, Laura. A month to ponder the past ten.

LAURA

Thanks, Danny. Don't hate me.

DANNY

I couldn't hate you if I wanted to. Take care of yourself, all right?

LAURA

I will, but the exit is mine, the check is yours.

[LAURA EXITS. SPOT ON DANNY]

DANNY

Sometimes when I'm with her I feel like a character in a movie. I've studied the script so I know exactly where to go and what to do. I know when a scenario is working and when it'll have to be re-shot. And when we part, it's as though the lights come up in the theater and I go home. One of these days, maybe the lights will come up and she and I will get up and leave the theater together. I don't know. I've liked the way we do our movie. We're two people who love each other. I don't want us to leave the theater together and then try squeezing ourselves into some pre-packaged neatly tied box. Life is too short. I'll miss you this next month, sweet Laura, dragon Laura, the girl of you, the woman of you.

[SPOT ON LAURA]

LAURA

I can't help it -- I fret over the ticking of my biological clock. It's like the pre-Christmas count-down sales -- only 365 more shopping days -- only five, only four, only three, two, one, blast off. Dating takes on a whole new light. I'm not going out with potential partners, but possible fathers of my children. I try to be my usual charming, seductive yet virginal self -- but the facade has holes in it -- like a net, out for the catch. I feel like I'm wearing a large sign across my chest that says, "Daddy or Bust". I have a dog -- a healthy sublimation of my maternal instincts. Soon, I tell myself. No self abuse. No sabotage. I can get what I want. Danny, Danny, Danny boy. Do I have to let you go?

[LAURA ENTERS. DANNY IS ALREADY SEATED OVER A DRINK, LOOKING AWAY FROM HER. SHE SITS AND DRINKS FROM DANNY'S GLASS]

LAURA

Still comparison shopping?

DANNY

After a month without seeing each other all you can think of is shopping?

LAURA

Some of us find something we like and buy it then and there because we like it. Then there are those who find something they like but won't buy until every store has been checked -- just in case someone else has a better deal or better quality or better yet -- a sale.

DANNY

Are you saying I'm a--

LAURA

--comparison shopper and I've been shopped and God only knows when you'll decide to buy -- if ever. Some people like to shop -- personally, I hate it. But you know what they say. 'Tis better to be shopped than to have never bought it at all.

DANNY

That's not fair.

LAURA

Yes, it is. Unfortunately, I still love you. I just want as much love in return. I'm worth it.

DANNY

I never meant to hurt your feelings.

LAURA

Please, hurt my feelings -- it's better than feeling like a mule with your carrot dangling just out of reach.

DANNY

My carrot?



I like carrots, especially yours.

LAURA

They're very healthy for you, especially mine.

DANNY

Hold it. I need to know what you want.

LAURA

What comes next?

DANNY

What?

LAURA

Assuming we decide to move on, what would we do next?

DANNY

I suppose we take time off for good behavior.

LAURA

Why would we do that?

DANNY

I guess we don't have to -- we could -- move on. Hit the wild frontier. [DANNY LAUGHS] Maybe there isn't enough time for you to develop good behavior.

LAURA

You misunderstood. [SHE BEGINS TO OBJECT] No, you did. Assuming we decide to move on in our relationship, get closer, what is the next step?

DANNY

With. Move on with our relationship.

LAURA

With?

DANNY

You said "in". You should have said "with."

LAURA

Words. How are we supposed to communicate when all we got are words. Laura, I've missed you. A year ago last Friday, your dog Clyde grabbed my frisbee and took to the hills.

DANNY

He brought it back. Eventually. Unscarred. Pretty much.

LAURA

DANNY

At least someone in your family has a soft mouth. [SHE BEGINS TO OBJECT] Let me finish. I'm ready. I'm ready for you, Laura. Do you know what I remember most about our time together?

LAURA

You make it sound so long ago.

DANNY

I remember trips to the market -- shopping for fruits, vegetables, bread, cheese--

LAURA

Chocolate.

DANNY

Chocolate. I didn't even mind standing in line as long as I was with you. I want to grow up, Laura. I'm tired of being a kid in a candy store. [GETS DOWN ON HIS KNEES] Will you go to the market with me?

LAURA

We are being watched.

DANNY

[LOUDER] Will you? Will you go to the market with me?

LAURA

You want to shop, don't you?

DANNY

Yes. I must. I must shop.

LAURA

Shop me? You want to shop me?

DANNY

With you. Shop with you.

LAURA

[SHIFTS UNCOMFORTABLY] This is not what I expected. I'm scared, Danny boy.

DANNY

So am I. So what?

LAURA

So what? Easy for you to say. It's been a wild month. After we talked, I switched gears. I got lost in activity. I've scheduled -- over-scheduled my time. I've reclaimed something. Something fragile. Something I thought I'd never lose. I didn't like you telling me I wasn't independent.

DANNY

I didn't. I said the young girl part of you wants someone to take care of you.

LAURA

And then I said that I considered myself independent and you said you didn't.

DANNY

No. That's not what I meant. I like the part of you that needs to be dependent. I have a part like that in me too, you know.

LAURA

I feel differently about life, Daniel.

DANNY

Daniel?

LAURA

I'm trying to be an adult. I recaptured meaning in my life this last month.

DANNY

I'm glad, I think.

LAURA

Are you?

DANNY

Yes, I am. I just wish I gave you meaning.

LAURA

You do, Danny. I wasn't not prepared for this. I thought this would be the end. Do you remember the first time we came here?

DANNY

I remember mud. And lots of it. Clyde took us on a wild goose chase that day. And the rain. It poured. This was the only place I knew that was dark enough, considering the shape we were in.

LAURA

Yes. And here we sit. I feel as awkward now as I did then. [RISES] I want to go home. Alone. Let's meet here next week.

DANNY

Same bat time, same bat channel.

LAURA

You're a good boy, Robin.

DANNY

I've missed you, Laura.

LAURA

I've missed you too. Miss me a little longer. A week is not so long.

My turn.

DANNY

Your turn?

LAURA

The exit is mine, the check is yours.

DANNY

[DANNY EXITS]

LAURA  
He did it. He came through. I didn't mean to push him away, but he freaked me out. At least the buzzing of my body and the wildfire in my head have calmed. What's next? I like the sound of that question now that I know he meant the two of us. Danny, you are full of surprises. I can't run the show all of the time – sometimes I need help. I surrender.

[LIGHTS FADE ON TABLE. SPOT ON DANNY]

DANNY  
That look of surprise on her face was priceless. Laura unmasked. I wonder when she started wearing a mask. I wonder how powerful the mask is. I wonder if she'll take off that mask permanently -- for me, at least. A week of wondering.

[LIGHTS FADE UP ON TABLE AND CHAIRS. LAURA SITS SIPPING FROM HER DRINK. DANNY ENTERS HURRIEDLY]

DANNY  
Parking around here sucks today. I've been driving around for twenty minutes. And I wasn't the only one. I just missed three perfectly good spaces. That cloud burst didn't help. You look terrific.

Thanks. I'm running a little ragged these days.

LAURA

Oh?

DANNY

I like what I'm doing. Some of it, anyway.

LAURA

I'm glad.

DANNY

I'm glad you're glad.

LAURA

DANNY  
What have you been doing?

LAURA  
Hold it. Can we take care of the other stuff first?

DANNY  
Other stuff?

LAURA  
The you and me stuff.

DANNY  
Oh, that other stuff. Look, a part of me is still out there driving around in circles. Let me hunt down a drink. Don't go away.

[DANNY EXITS]

LAURA  
How is it I've thought about this conversation a hundred times and I still don't know what to say. He's as nervous as I am, poor boy. We never used to be tongue-tied. Long talks late into the night--

[DANNY ENTERS]

DANNY  
That's much better. What are you smiling at?

LAURA  
Do you remember our first phone calls?

DANNY  
We talked for hours.

LAURA  
We never ran out of things to talk about.

DANNY  
The sound of Clyde singing in the background.

LAURA  
He only howls at fire engines.

DANNY  
And ambulances and police sirens. I'm sorry. You mentioned phone calls?

LAURA  
Yes. Phone calls. It was always so easy to talk on the phone.

DANNY  
Are you asking me to call you on the phone?

LAURA  
As a matter of fact I am.

DANNY  
Enough with the games already.

LAURA  
Just do it.

DANNY  
Whatever. [HE DIALS AN IMAGINARY PHONE AND MAKES RINGING SOUNDS]

LAURA  
[PICKS UP THE PHONE] Hello?

DANNY  
Hello. May I please speak to Clyde?

LAURA  
No, you may not.

DANNY  
Then will you relay a message to him for me?

LAURA  
What's the message?

DANNY  
The message is, tell your owner I've missed her and I need to talk to her. Ask her to please meet me here in the present. I'm having a drink with her at this very moment.

LAURA  
All right, all right, so I'm not so brave. What comes next?

DANNY  
That's my line.

LAURA  
Mine too, now.

DANNY  
She stoops to plagiarism.

LAURA  
There ain't no copyright on that one.

DANNY

I guess not. But I was so convinced you'd have an answer. You usually have an answer for everything.

LAURA

This time I don't. All I know is that I'm here. And I want to be reminded of what it is I've missed.

DANNY

Do you mean me?

LAURA

Yes.

DANNY

You mean I can stop writing and rewriting the possible scenarios so I don't look as surprised as you were?

LAURA

You did surprise me, Danny boy. Did you really run through all the possible outcomes before coming here?

DANNY

Yes. No. Well maybe a little. Maybe a lot.

LAURA

Have we come to some kind of conclusion?

DANNY

I think so. But there's still no hurry, Laura. We're here. Moving in a forward motion. Together.

LAURA

I'm glad.

DANNY

I'm glad you're glad.

LAURA

So why do I still feel so unsettled?

DANNY

Because we haven't really settled anything yet. This is the last time I'll ask, so you had better have an answer. What's next?

LAURA

An answer. Danny boy wants an answer and I don't have one. But I do have an idea. The sun's come out.

DANNY

That was your idea?

LAURA

I left Clyde in the car. He's waiting to be taken for a walk. Care to get wet and muddy again?

DANNY

Excellent idea.

LAURA

You're welcome to come up with answers of your own, you know.

DANNY

I know and in time we both will. Amazing, we each paid our bill. Hug?

[THEY HUG]

LAURA

I forgot how good you smell.

DANNY

I remember how good you feel.

LAURA

You're a good man, Danny.

DANNY

Speaking of good men. [PULLS OUT A BONE] If the master doesn't weary from his walkies, I am prepared with another diversion.

[END OF PLAY]