

In the Park

By Neal Barth

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STORY OF THE PLAY

What fun jogging can be! Think of all the people you can meet! Here's a spoof on America's biggest health habit. Jill and Nathan have stop jogging for a moment for him to gasp for breath. Soon Jill is off again with a spring in her step while Nathan tries to recoup on the park bench. Before long Ralph appears, who, in between his panting and wheezing from running, is vicariously plotting the demise of his physician who ordered him to start exercising. Edna, sobbing and exhausted from her half block run, makes her appearance, and soon other runners, happy and otherwise, enter the picture. Suddenly, a man confronts them all. It's a holdup! But not to worry. With the help of an unseen dog, the runners handle the situation in a hilarious and effective way. Great fun. About 30 minutes.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3m, 3 w, 3 flexible)

JILL: Energetic, loves to run.
NATHAN: Jill's boyfriend; not much of a runner.
RALPH or RUTHIE: Has nightmares about running.
EDNA: Tries to run while sobbing. Called "fat."
JEFF: A dog is *not* his best friend.
HERB or HENRIETTA: His feet look like sausage.
TONY or TINA: Runs with Jean.
JEAN: Looks remarkably like Jill.
THE MAN: Attacks the runners.

The delightful situations of this play are adaptable to any aged characters from late teens through the octogenarian. It plays well with very little alteration in dialogue.

SETTING

A park area around a bench, on a frequently used jogging path.

TIME

Probably last summer.

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(The scene is the park. There is a bench center with various trees and bushes around. A woman, JILL, jogs on. She is obviously in super shape as she is not out of breath. She jogs around the bench, then jogs in place as she looks off stage. After a short wait her running companion, NATHAN, pants into view.)

JILL: *(Still running in place.)* Where've you been, silly?

NATHAN: *(Trying to get his breath.)* Whoosh.... I guess I'm a little out of shape.

JILL: Hurry--let's go!

NATHAN: Go? Go where?

JILL: *(SHE starts off.)* We have more running to do.

NATHAN: *(HE struggles to the bench.)* You're out of your mind.

(SHE returns and jogs around the bench as HE flops down trying to get his breath)

JILL: What's the matter with you?

NATHAN: I'm about to expire.

JILL: After half a lap?

NATHAN: A mile is a half lap?

JILL: Sure, we're only halfway through the park!

NATHAN: What happened to the good old quarter mile track...four laps to a mile?

JILL: We just have to go up that little ridge and we're half done for this morning. *(SHE sits next to HIM.)*

NATHAN: *(Incredulous.)* Half done...half done? I'm about half-cooked inside this oven you've got me wearing.

JILL: It helps you sweat.

NATHAN: That's a gross understatement...did you just say half done for the morning? Is that what you said? *(Rises.)* This morning?

(HE'S up so SHE'S ready to go again.)

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JILL: Sure, twice a day! (*SHE does a deep squat to limber up.*) Keeps your kidneys healthy. (*She starts off.*) Come on!

NATHAN: (*HE slumps on the bench again.*) I'll never make it, Jill. Pick me up on your next lap.

JILL: (*Stops in front of HIM.*) Nathan, do you love me?

NATHAN: Sure.

JILL: Then show it.

NATHAN: Right here?

JILL: Right now.

NATHAN: (*Shrugs with a gleam.*) OK, now you're talking.

(*HE grabs HER and pulls her down and starts necking with her.*)

JILL: What are you doing? (*SHE fights HIM.*) Stop! (*Elbows him in the stomach.*)

NATHAN: (*Doubled over in pain.*) Ohhhh....what did you do that for?

JILL: (*Highly indignant.*) What's the matter with you?

NATHAN: You hit me in the stomach!

JILL: I know.

NATHAN: Well, that's what's the matter with me!

JILL: That brought on the sudden attack of "the loves"?

NATHAN: The what?

JILL: "The loves!" "The loves!" I can't stand "necking."

NATHAN: You did last night.

JILL: (*Not understanding.*) I did what?

NATHAN: You liked necking.

JILL: What are you talking about?

NATHAN: Necking, you liked it last night. Now, you say you can't stand it. I don't understand you at all.

JILL: Nathan, I was referring to the term "necking." I prefer to call it "the loves." "Necking" sounds so trite and teenager-ish. Now what were we talking about?

NATHAN: (*HE puts his arm around HER again.*) Us having an attack of neck... uh, "the loves" right here.

JILL: We weren't either. I asked you if you loved me.

NATHAN: (*Rises.*) I do.

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JILL: Then show me.

NATHAN: No.

JILL: Why not?

NATHAN: Because the last time I tried, you hit me in the stomach.

JILL: That was for trying to assault me.

NATHAN: Jill, I have never tried to assault you. You wanted me to show you that I loved you. I tried. You assaulted me!

JILL: I just wanted you to demonstrate your love by running with me.

NATHAN: You mean... (*Gestures on up the course.*)

JILL: I do.

NATHAN: (*Looks off at the course, pauses.*) Jill, how long have we known each other?

JILL: Three months.

NATHAN: We love each other, right?

JILL: Of course, silly.

NATHAN: But we don't really know much about each other's backgrounds, do we? I mean other than being from Dubuque, Iowa, you don't know anything about me.

JILL: I know that I love you.

NATHAN: Don't change the subject. I'm making a point.

JILL: (*Teasing.*) All right, big boy, lay it on me!

NATHAN: All right. The point is, I don't know anything about you either and all this running is putting a strain on my love.

JILL: Is that....

NATHAN: Don't interrupt. I knew you jogged...a little...but, this...this is ridiculous. I ran in high school but that was years ago. The steel legs have atrophied into sponge, the lungs have shriveled. (*HE thumps his chest.*) I now have two things that look like raisins in here.

JILL: They'll develop, they'll build up again.

NATHAN: I don't want them built up. I like raisins. I want scrawny legs. I like the way my pants bag and sag on me. What I'm saying is please leave me alone. Don't make me jog with you. I'm not finished with my life, yet. There are still too many challenges to be met, too many things to be

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