

# After the Break-Up: A Girl's Guide

Pages: 240

Publisher: Big Finish (May 15, 2012)

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

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*After the Break-Up: A Girl's Guide*      *Carrie Sutton*

First published in June 2010 by Big Finish Productions Ltd, PO Box 1127, Maidenhead, SL6 3LW

[www.bigfinish.com](http://www.bigfinish.com)

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Musical Memories

Movie Musts and Must-Not's



tears, the trauma and the dates to make you die.

'This should all be written down,' she said, some months later. 'There are stories to tell!'

And so it was that over a large coffee, a great debate over emotional responsibility and the relating of my most recent dating disaster that the plan to write this book was hatched. It's all thanks to Ginny.

So here it is. The good, the bad and the ugly... and the men that came along for the ride.

*The End*

*i) The decision*

Â

*I'm going to do it...*

*Remembering the perfect wedding...*

*No more tears...*

*Admitting you've done wrong...*

*A matter of timing...*

*I'm going to leave...*

I'm sitting on the bottom step and it strikes me that I will do it. I'm going to leave; actually going to do it. Oh, holy crap! How in the name of hell have I ended up here?

The dog is sitting by the front door returning my befuddled expression with a chirpy look of 'Are we going to the park now?' We are not. I pick her up, snuggle her, smell her, and she licks my face clean, something I have never successfully managed to stop her from doing.

I sit her on my hip and wander aimlessly round the house looking at our things – my things, his things: the DVDs of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the cushions, the computers, the clutter in the hallway, the drawer of useful things. The puppet that was never really mine, and the Chinese unit that was never really his. I look at our wedding photographs.

*The luckiest girl in the world*

It had been a very sunny day in the end, our wedding day, and I'd felt like the luckiest girl in the world. English weather is pretty unpredictable at the best of times and the day before there had been rain of the horizontal variety – we had to get the wedding favours from the car to the hotel in what can only be described as monsoon conditions! It was absolutely lagging it down and the wind (Arctic, I'm quite sure) froze my fingers as I gripped my lacy almond parcels for dear life! I prayed the next day would be warmer as we shimmied past that day's bride, who was now wearing not white, but a strange shade of beige with big chocolate-coloured stains up the back of her frock.

She looked a sorry old sight. Her big meringue, dull as it was, had been completely ruined, yet she still stood there smiling, complete with four soggy bridesmaids, a muddy mother-in-law and a drenched flower girl, who all started traipsing after her as she sloped her way out of the hotel garden.

They seemed happy enough, but still I prayed for good weather – ‘Please, please, *please* don’t let that be me!’ – and I got my wish. I didn’t spend the day looking like a drowned rat with half the churchyard up my underskirt, so I felt lucky. I was getting married and I was happy. And the pictures would be beautiful. The pictures seemed so important at the time. The pictures *are* beautiful. We look great – a little too much like brother and sister if I’m being honest – but great nonetheless, and we’re smiling, everyone’s smiling, everyone’s delighted – and we’re all just a little bit pissed. I wonder if the photos will be all that is left of ‘us’ in the end?

I’m brought back to reality by the dog who is now French-kissing my ear, attempting a tunnelling mission into my brain with her tongue. She has her legs round my waist and feet up on my shoulder like a small child and I realise that it won’t be like this for much longer. So I give in and take her to her favourite park. It was the last time we ever went there. Just a matter of time

By the time I reached The End, I’d already cried so much that I didn’t think there were any more tears left to be had, even if I’d tried to suck them out with a Dyson. I found I’d done quite a bit of the hard grieving already and, in my heart, I’d known it was coming, as if it had all been just a matter of time. Like when you see something out of the corner of your eye. You know it’s there but you can happily go on ignoring it, whistling away tunelessly to yourself, as it sits waiting.

The last year or so had been testing, trying, confusing and complicated, and we’d already done a lot of the actual breaking up: the in-depth discussions, the tears, the tantrums, the rows (oh God, the rows!), the seemingly endless compromises, the half-acceptance that things really weren’t working any more.

I’m not sure it was quite the same for him. I know he struggled greatly when The End arrived on our doorstep, along with the architect’s drawings for the long-awaited loft conversion and orangery roof. As with all things in life, timing is everything and ours couldn’t have been worse.

It happened the week before our wedding anniversary. Bloody marvellous! It’s invariably some special event like this that does it. A birthday, bar mitzvah or Valentine’s extravaganza that finally pulls the pimple of unhappiness to the surface, causing it to pop all over your life...

We’d finally bought our house, had just hired the builders to plug up the large hole in the kitchen ceiling and were beginning the renovation works that would transform our lives, somehow making them complete. It was a sad and somehow surreal moment when I realised that the bad stuff ultimately outweighed the good stuff; that I’d become a statistic along with Linda from down the road and Miranda from marketing. But the Ex, despite having mentioned divorce twice already himself, was still really shocked when I eventually announced that enough was enough. We had simply run out of road, rope and *definitely* tissues! There was no more fighting to be done, in any sense of the word. It was over. It had obviously been brewing for quite some time but for some reason the Ex (along with about a zillion other blokes) just didn’t realise the extent to which we were broken until it stopped working altogether. It was rather unfortunate that the ‘epiphany’ came too late. I just couldn’t do it any more; any of it. I was completely drained of the will to go on, the will to keep trying, the will to keep fighting for it. But, despite knowing I was doing the right thing, it still devastated me in a million sharp little ways. Even though I was the one who wanted to get out, the finality of it was strange. It felt like I was hacking my own limb off in order to free

myself and escape from a burning building. I was left with a huge hole in my life and at times in search of my marbles!

Half me

That's not to say there weren't good times; I suppose that's why you stay when the chips are down, right? We'd had some wonderful times, some hilarious times... There was the day we met the affectionate giant tortoises in Mauritius, feeling elated as we stroked their long necks, deciding that they felt like a cross between a Hoover pipe and a good-quality leather handbag. There was the diving we'd done, our joint and virgin journey into the world under the ocean, taking in the turtles, the tuna and the blue titan triggers. There had been trips to the countryside, rides on rollercoasters... there had been the day we first knew we loved each other. But there had also been some horrid times too and as time went by, these took over, casting a shadow over all the good that had gone before, leaving a bitter after taste in the mouth.

So, I guess you have to weigh up what is acceptable and worth settling for, worth living with, and what is not. At the end of the day, I found I couldn't settle for half-happy. Because that meant I was also half-unhappy, half-lonely... half me (and I'm only 5' 3"). Being lonely within a relationship is no way to carry on, it is far worse than being lonely on your own and I kept telling myself this over and over, trying to drown out the other voice in my head that still wanted to be married, be a wife and be in love. Thousands do it though, carry on regardless. But I simply refused to be like one of those lovelorn celebrities, trying to enjoy capitalist culture, in the horrible knowledge that all the nice houses, fancy cars and extravagant gestures don't make it any better. They don't equal an investment in the relationship.

Ignoring 'Us'

It is very easy to hide behind the 'stuff' when the going gets tough, coasting along nicely while glossing over the ugly parts, being beautifully distracted by all manner of ultimately worthless things: the Schreiber kitchen, the automatic soap dispenser, the self-operating squirrel killer for the garden. We'd spent hours and hours like this, poring over exactly which tap set would look best in the new en-suite, arguing about which overpriced designer radiator should grace the hallway (French or old English?) and precisely how to remove the very 'beautiful' pebbledashing from the front of the otherwise stunning Victorian terrace. We'd spent years doing it, bickering over the nitty-gritty, all the while completely ignoring the very thing that was supposed to matter the most: Us. Our relationship had become secondary to the very future we were trying to create and were destroying in our striving to get there. I felt like *we'd* been neglected, missing the little moments that cost nothing to provide but cost everything when they are not given. We'd become slaves to our own existence. We often saw nothing of each other as hideous hours were worked to provide all this 'stuff', slowly becoming less and less attentive to the other's needs when we did eventually find time together. That's not to say that you shouldn't work hard and a lot of the time work has to come first. It's all about striking the right balance. It is easy to see how you can lose sight of what you're doing it all for, as the relationship takes a permanent back seat. And if it's a flawed one, ultimately you may sacrifice it. If one thing or the other takes precedence the whole time then there's no equilibrium, no harmony. There must be quality time for the two of you, even if it's brief, as well as time for yourself and for your work. For us, we had pruned our tree on one side only, it had grown unevenly and despite my best efforts to sprout banyan-like roots from my armpits to support us, we had eventually toppled over.

Relationships are always work. Not in a bad way, but work nonetheless. Nice work, usually. But once the understanding, compassion, compromise and solidarity had ebbed away, there was nowhere really to go but down. I think when The End was nigh, I just sort of knew it in my heart. I just *knew* it. Like a heaviness that must be lifted, even though the undoing of it would be upsetting, I simply couldn't go on lugging the weight of it around any more.

### The things I'd done wrong

Knowing and realising the part I'd played in The Break-Up was important too. I had to painfully admit the things I'd done wrong. Admit them to him, to myself; the hurt I'd also doled out along the way.

'It's important to help you accept what is happening,' my Best Friend (and my better judgement) told me, 'to help you move on and not make those mistakes again.' But it was a hard fact to face that we'd each contributed to some degree to the demise of what was at one time a great thing.

There was the snapping I shouldn't have done... the being-pissed-off-at-nothing-in-particular I shouldn't have allowed myself to get away with... the nagging about the toilet seat and who picks up the dog poo that really, in the grand scheme of things, didn't matter.

I was also, at times, far too in need of him and I became frustrated when things were beyond my control. Out of desperation to save our crumbling relationship I found myself hankering for and pressurising him for his time. I craved time together, wanting to feel like I was still important to him, wanting to make him happy – anything to reach him on a level beyond family illness, work pressures and the trivialities of building works and daily life, all of which I'm sure (with hindsight) just added pressure to the cooker.

This *modus operandi* made things even worse, but desperation does funny things to us all. Though I must say, on the whole neediness issue, unless you start out in life as a real clingster, neediness is often a by-product of feeling neglected and unsupported. If someone you love pushes you aside, knowingly or otherwise, you will clamour for their time and affection all the more. You may even end up looking for it elsewhere – and I don't mean in the drawer of useful things! Not that I left one guy to be with another, but it's easy to see how it happens – the way things had got with me and the Ex, he might as well have picked me up and chucked me at the nearest passing available man!

I was also too nervous at the time to admit that our relationship would not end well. I didn't want to believe it was falling apart and so a lot of the time I was guilty of allowing things to continue as they were without even knowing I was doing it. I didn't have enough inbuilt self-esteem to respect what I – we – needed and deserved, often choosing to keep the peace instead of trying to head off our downward spiral. At other times I was simply at a complete loss as to what to do for the best. So I allowed things to go on unchecked and, through my own feeling of helplessness, swept things under the carpet, ignoring all the alarm bells. So I was responsible for where we ended up too.

### Alternative endings

I spent many sleepless nights in the months surrounding The Break-Up worrying about how the hell we'd untangle the mess, going over and over things in my head, reliving arguments we'd had with various alternative endings. You know how it goes. There's:

- the ending where you kiss and make up, have amazing sex and find yourself in love again
- the one where you throw your favourite mug at him, shocking him into wonderful silence and at last allowing for an actual conversation
- the one where you finally kill each other with the garden spade and that useless crème brûlée burner.

I literally spent hours and hours like this, replaying and reconstructing both sides of each argument, trying to reason with him and myself, fathoming out what I truly wanted. But I would always come back to the same place in the end. I was simply not happy any more, and the love we'd had was evaporating. It was pretty horrific deciding and realising what I must do, but on the flip side there was also that great sense of relief too. There was finally some resolution.

My Best Friend once said, 'Better to leave and regret it than stay and regret it'. For my money, she spoke wisely and I know which the better ending was for me. Wherever a relationship has gone wrong, I think it's important to realise that even if you were given a magic opportunity to start at the very beginning again you would probably do nothing differently – so you mustn't beat yourself up. We all make choices based on our knowledge, comprehension and feeling at a certain point in time and we can't take what we know now and apply it to the past. The mistakes would be just the same, even if we could do a *Back to the Future* and live it through again.

\*\*\* Remember:

*Everyone's a genius with hindsight and can usually see where the errors were, but remember: you definitely did the best you could at the time, and what's done is done. If The End doesn't hurt, then it probably wasn't worth it in the first place (which somehow would've been worse), so have no regrets. It is only the things we do from now that we can control – only the future that can be altered.*

ii) *Making the break*

*What would happen now...*

*Other people's opinions...*

*The divorce issue...*

*Lots of tears...*

*Moving through it...*

No-one tells you what to do

Initially, when it comes to making the break, you get this huge surge of relief as months or years of anguish and uncertainty come to an end. Only to come crashing back down to Earth with a resounding thud as you realise you now have to *do* something about it in real terms – not just in your head!

Until the Ex and I had put things into gear and officially called it off it hadn't felt like it was really happening. It was as if it were happening to someone else. I spent quite a few weeks wafting around in some sort of 'half place' – a half-arsed, halfway house break-up place. The veritable no-man's land of dead and dying relationships. We'd broken up but no-one knew yet, so did that mean we hadn't *really* broken up, we were just 'on a break'? If it wasn't official were we just taking time apart? What would *actually* happen now? Wasn't I supposed to get some sort of magical manual miraculously delivered in the post?

It was no longer an 'if', but the 'when' and the 'how' still eluded me. No-one tells you what to do once you've decided, do they? I'd half expected the clouds to part, the sun to come shining through, a little leprechaun to leap out and show me the way to the afterlife of relationships.

Well, the clouds did part, sort of, though nowhere near far enough for the leprechaun to get through, so although I could finally see clearer skies ahead, I had to figure out the way forward for myself – with a little help from my friends of course. And I'd thought the hardest part was over... little did I know! It was as if The Ex and I had put up an emotional blockade between us, invisible but no less dividing, then pulled apart to opposite sides of our Berlin Wall; starting to do things separately, putting a vague plan into place. It was like watching some girl who looked like me sleeping alone, packing overnight bags and boxing up memories to be put away until some future date when 'the sorting' would be done.

### Making a brave step

This is the part when you have to give up any remaining bits of the relationship that in spite of everything you still don't want to lose. It can be absolutely soul-destroying and you may not even be able to face putting so much as one foot in front of the other (let alone washing your hair, making it to Tesco or going out for coffee for a while) as you make Best Friends with a box of Kleenex, contemplating taking out shares in the company.

Once again, don't beat yourself up. It's OK to feel like shit. It's to be expected and people do understand. After all, nearly everyone has or will go through the same thing at some point in their lives, so you are never alone, even though it may feel that way at the time. It is highly unlikely that you'll meet the love of your life at 16 and live happily ever after; seldom does this 'get it right first time' phenomenon actually occur. You'll probably go through a whole string of boyfriends (maybe even a husband or two!) before you finally find the one that sticks, one that is right. It's a cliché, but it's all part of life's colour, life's great tapestry, and we live and learn from it. There are millions of people getting screwed over in the name of love on a daily basis and everyone (including your granny) has a hideous break-up hanging in their closet, along with that dress they keep yet never wear, and that awful jumpsuit from the eighties that might come back in to fashion. So it's not just you, honest!

While ending the relationship might be the right thing to do, it is not the easier choice by any stretch of the imagination so don't let anyone try to convince or bully you into believing otherwise! You are making a brave step, not taking the easy way out. And even if it was not your choice to end things and you've well and truly had the picnic rug pulled out from under your feet, you still have to move on with things by yourself and go through making the break. It is really tough, one of the most difficult things you'll ever have to deal with (that, kids, buying a house and refolding a fitted bed-sheet perhaps) – but you *can* do it!

### Do the scary thing

A lot of people think you should stay and fight on, no matter how things are going or how bad they have become. I guess this is a fairly typical reaction with certain types of people. For some reason they would gladly bicker on until the bitter end with a partner rather than do the scary thing and Get Out. You may find that some sit in high judgement (feigned or otherwise) through shock, secret envy of your courage to make such a bold decision, or because they have nothing better to do than look down their nose at you and evaluate your choices – particularly if there are children involved. Fingers crossed this won't be true of your *actual* friends! Often, though, it's because the end of *your* relationship with that person may signal the end of *their* relationship with them as well. It can be a lot for them to cope with too, especially if you were very involved in their lives as a pair. They may think that the all-round upheaval will somehow be less if you stay together. Or perhaps they might not have been capable of making the break if it had been them in the same situation. As we all know, some folks think you should stay together come hell or high water just because you said you would. Well, that's all well and good, but I say: *This is not 1950-something when women were tied to the kitchen sink in a floral pinny and men were chained to their offices.* If you are unhappy, really unhappy, then you have every right to decide to get out.

### The whole divorce issue

Things are especially tricky when there is the whole divorce issue floating around. Before you embark on a divorce, you feel as if you have to decide whether there is anything left to save, anything you *can* save, anything you *want* to save... But sometimes it's not even as simple as that. Sometimes there is still a lot left between two people, but it is just too broken – there has been too much damage done and one party or other simply can't face the slog any more. Or they may just choose not to face it any more.

For me, getting divorced straight off was the only decision that felt right, though it can of course take many people a long time to arrive at any kind of final decision. But I found the thought of separating for a period of time and *then* getting divorced was unendurable. I needed to completely cut and move on.

The undoing of a marriage is different from other break-ups and is usually more complicated than a split that doesn't have a legal tie or contract. Unless, of course, there are property, children or money involved, in which case it can be just as complicated or even more so! It can take quite a time for a divorce to be made final, so you won't be officially released from the relationship immediately. It also costs money, of greatly varying amounts. It is a very final move.

Getting divorced is not easy, no matter how right it is or how ready you are, and is certainly not something to be taken lightly or decided upon rashly in the heat of the moment (neither is marriage of course, but I think that's another book in itself). Once you've set the wheels in motion, the very nature of legal dealings makes any kind of reverse emotional decision very difficult, so be sure!

Of course, there are cases where couples don't realise how much they love each other until they are faced with the state dissolving their wedding vows. But I'd say that, once you start to unpick it through official channels, more often than not there really isn't any going back. Even the 'nice' divorces are hard. In your head you somehow sort of hope that, once the decision is made, you can go skipping down to the courthouse or nearest solicitor's office (well, maybe not skipping) and say 'We don't want to be together any more. Can we have a divorce please?' Then you just file a few papers, pay a small fee and that's it. Done!

Unfortunately it doesn't really work like that and is rather more complicated than the 'Let's wave a

magic wand' version, so make sure you get good advice and have plenty of support. \*

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What do you do when The One turns out not to be The One after all? When your dream home is snatched away from you, unfinished Schreiber kitchen units and all, and your dog is sent to live with your parents? When you suddenly have to find a flatmate, a way to pay the rent, a reason to keep going and maybe, ultimately... a new boyfriend?

Sharp, funny and hugely entertaining, Carrie Sutton charts her life in the year following the Big Break-Up. The bad dates... the good friends... the times when you think you can't go on... and the moment you realise you are finally OK on your own.

If you've experienced a Big Break-Up and need some cheering up, a bit of friendly advice and a few practical tips; then this is the book for you! Reading this book is like talking to your best friend over a large glass of wine. Uplifting, truthful and wise; as a feel-good remedy, it does everything except order you a cab home at the end of the evening!

Carrie Sutton writes with style, wit and insight about a problem we've all had to face at some point in our lives. It's a must-read for those who've just come out of a relationship; a blueprint for survival for women and a lesson for men! - Alistair McGowan

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6 Books to Read After a Breakup - The Cut - Project Management for You\*, Cesar Abeid's new book. Decomposing: Break it down into smaller parts or deliverables. A few years ago, we were chatting with friends after church when I realized that Laura, then only 19 Books That Will Get You Through Any Breakup - BuzzFeed - Breakup, Books, Divorce Marriage - Stardew Valley Wiki - Read and Download Now <http://librarysecret.com/?book=188716684X>Get [PDF] [PDF] It's Not Me It's You How long should i wait for my husband to come back - Breakup, Books, Divorce Books of the year 2019 by Charlie Connelly - CJ Scarlet 'Superstore' Recap: [Spoiler] Is Father of Amy's Baby - TVLine - Xixue's Guide To Life. Nov 28, 2019 - They also provide a FREE ebook when purchasing the premium After four plastic surgery procedures, Singaporean blogger Wendy Cheng, also. A Singapore girl's guide to living a life to remember. add height or width to the space because they don't break up a space visually. Essay About Love and Literary Taste - Books - Review - The - "Find someone who calls you beautiful like it's your name. Someone who is ready to fight for you and you for them with everything you have." - Sarah Higgins If Surviving A Relationship Break-Up - Top 20 - McGill University - So to catch up: Since we last spoke, Michael Bloomberg and his substantial. create the Consumer Financial

Protection Bureau, and wrote a book on middle-class incomes. He remains a strong contender, but hasn't broken into the top tier.. Gillibrand emphasized women's issues, ranging from sexual Top 20 free things to do in Melbourne - Lonely Planet - It's Called a Breakup Because It's Broken by Greg Behrendt " You might have I've actually read this book over and over again after almost every breakup I've ever if you're the last single girl left on the face of this planet " this book is for you... The Single Woman's Guide to Retirement by Jan Cullinane. After the Break-Up: A Girl's Guide eBook by Carrie Sutton - Survivor removed Dan after an off-camera incident': more evidence of its The reality TV show of the decade: The Great British Bake-Off. The Breakup Book: A Girl's Guide to Putting the Pieces Back - He broke down one day after 2 months and sent me one of those novel texts... When I wrote The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex, I. He didn't have the courage

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