

What If I Never Have Sex Again?

by

Susan Moon

I'm afraid I'll never have sex again. Never lie spoon to spoon with another person. I don't feel like having sex right this minute, which is fortunate because I don't have anybody to have it with. But I'm not sure I'll keep on not wanting to have sex right this minute for the rest of my life. When I was younger and didn't have a partner, I didn't think about this. I assumed I was in between relationships. Now, at 65, I wonder if I have quietly passed beyond "in between."

Even if I did want to have sex, maybe nobody would want to have sex with me. Confidence ebbs away as skin sags in private as well as public places. I suppose you could always resort to the cover of darkness, or never taking off your nightie, but can't fingers still feel the sag? Couples who grow old together get used to each other's sagging in slow increments, but it's a whole other matter to get to know somebody new when you're already wrinkled up. Plus, I'm not as bendable as I used to be.

I used to like sex a lot if I liked the person, but when I didn't have it, I didn't miss it much. Sometimes I missed the person. Saying I miss sex is like saying I miss wearing my hiking boots, when what I miss is standing at Paiute Pass watching the cloud shadows run across the lake below. I miss going where the hiking boots take me. "Having sex" isn't something that I can miss, all by itself, because I could never peel it away from the person who, moments before, might have been reading aloud to me in bed, and who,

shortly afterwards, might be snoring beside me just loud enough that I nudge him to quiet him.

Not having rolled in the hay for a while now—never mind exactly how long—I hardly ever think about it. I’m lucky not to want what I don’t have. It’s convenient. I want, as in *lack*, sex, but I don’t want, as in *desire*, it. At the movies, in the erotic parts, I’m like an eight-year-old: “Oh gross! Hurry up and finish this scene! It has nothing to do with me!”

I used to be just plain interested in the whole subject of sex, and I liked writing about it, too. Now I prefer writing about not having sex.

I get annoyed with the way people are always saying, out of political correctness, that old people are sexy, too, that old folks can have rich sex lives, etc., etc. Yeah, but do we *have* to? Whatever old people want to do in bed is fine with me, but I don’t want to feel like there’s something wrong with me if I’m not doing it. I claim the right to lose libido as I get older. (Still, I’m not promising.)

I suspect that more people share my lack of desire than admit it. In the ’40s, Kinsey discovered that quite a few people were up to all kinds of tricks they had not been admitting, but now, post-Kinsey, post–sexual revolution, it’s hard for people to admit what they’re *not* doing.

I do miss some of the side effects of sex. You get to touch and be touched by another warm-blooded being. There are other ways to accomplish this: getting a massage and going to the dentist are two of the most expensive. Grandchildren offer touching for free, but my granddaughter lives more than a thousand miles away.

There are also pets. When I went on a solitary retreat in the woods, I took my sister's dog, Satchmo, with me for company. His fur felt good under my fingers. I groomed him with a curry brush every morning when we came back from our walk, to get the burrs out of his coat. When he saw me pick up the brush he came right to me and leaned his body into mine. Sometimes he licked my face as I was brushing him, and I took it to mean, "Thank you. I love you." I missed his hugs and kisses when I returned him to my sister.

It feels like I sometimes go for as long as six months, the length of time between my dental hygienist appointments, without being touched by another human being. It's not really so, because I hug people in greeting from time to time, but those hugs don't last nearly as long as having my teeth cleaned.

Then there's the matter of intimacy, one of the most famous side effects of sex. Some would even say that sex is a side effect of intimacy. In any case, sex is an excellent way to blur the distinction between your innermost self and someone else's—probably the best. I've heard it said that sex is for making babies, but there are other ways of doing that nowadays; I think sex was invented for the very purpose of enabling us to discover that we are not separate.

I do miss intimacy. I have close friends and family members with whom I share intimacy in the form of talk. We tell each other our deepest concerns. But this is still not the boundary-blurring intimacy I'm talking about. It's not the well of clear water you fall into together when you and your lover look into each other's eyes from a few inches away. The last person with whom I had prolonged eye contact was my sister's dog. I could get my own dog, but I travel too much.

Aside from the huge concern about intimacy, there's the matter of time management. I'm usually doing something else anyway. If I was having sex right now, for example, I wouldn't be writing these sentences, and you wouldn't be reading them. Writing itself provides a kind of connection, although the intimacy between us is one-directional.

And even if I never have sex again, it's not as if I'm going to die a virgin, wondering what I missed out on. My life has included plenty of good times that I won't describe to you here. Also, sometimes I had a headache.

Celibacy is another way to think about not having sex; celibacy is chosen as a positive path. (Perhaps I could take a retroactive vow of celibacy and get credit for time served.) It's a way to extend your love to the whole universe. If you don't have one particular sexual partner, you are equally married to everyone in the world, even if you've never met them. And not just people, but trees and rocks and streams and stars.

I'm not accountable to any one person for what time I go to bed, or how far I fling my legs out when I get there. With no one rubbing my head or pointing out a new mole on my back, my body becomes generic, transparent. It's my job to feed and clothe and house it, and take it out for walks. I do these things not only for the sake of my own health and wellbeing but for the sake of my lover, the universe. The sun touches whatever part of my body I turn to it, whether I'm wearing my nightie or not. When I swim in the Eel River there's no space between my skin and the water. When I take a deep breath the wind moves into me and fills me up. So, what if I never have sex again? So what?

Still . . .