

Brittany Runs a Marathon (2019)



Manhattanite Brittany must lose weight for health reasons. (c) Amazon Studios

Director/writer Paul Downs Colaizzo's story about a hefty Manhattanite down on herself will cheer the hearts of all who like to root for the underdog. 28-year-old Brittany ([Jillian Bell](#)), no longer able to come up with advertising jingles, ekes out a living as an usher at an Off-Broadway theater, and escapes into late-night parties with her vain roommate Gretchen (Alice Lee), whose goal is to become an Instagram star. A visit to her doctor (actually to secure a prescription for a drug that she will abuse) reveals that her health is at great risk unless she changes her lifestyle, including the shedding of up to 55 pounds. "That's the weight of a Siberian husky!" she replies. The doctor's reaction convinces her that she has to make some changes—changes that Gretchen definitely will not like.

Joining a gym program proves too expensive for her meager budget, Brittany decides to take up running, the streets and parks being free to all. The results of running just a block are humiliating, so she accepts the invitation of the unlikable

woman upstairs, Katherine (Michaela Watkins), to join her group. She quickly bonds with another newcomer Seth (Micah Stock), who hates exercise as much as she. We know from his looks and temperament that he will become a faithful supporter, not love interest. That fated person she will meet when she answers an ad for a house/dog sitter from one of Manhattan's 1%.

Upon her arrival she discovers that the night-time dog sitter Jern (Utkarsh Ambudkar) has been living in the mansion illegally because the owner is away most of the year. We know they are meant for each other because she immediately dislikes the slacker. Soon she moves in after splitting from her nasty roommate Gretchen—the one-time party mate sneers that Brittany will always be a fat girl inside.

As Brittany trains with her two companions she does begin to lose pounds, even joining with them to run 5K. It was when they set their sights on the New York Marathon that she had taken the dog-sitting job so she could earn the needed extra money. During this time she is encouraged by her supportive sister Cici (Kate Arrington) and brother-in-law, Demetrius (Lil Rey Howery) who live in her native Philadelphia. (I love it that their interracial marriage is no issue with anyone in the story.) They crop up later in the film when Brittany injures her ankle and has to drop out of things to recuperate, returning to Philadelphia because she and Jern are thrown out of the mansion when its owner returns unexpectedly.

The turning point for Brittany's emotional and spiritual journey is triggered at a milestone birthday party thrown for Demetrius when she verbally attacks an obese young woman at the event. All of her self-loathing she projects onto the distraught woman, creating a party-stopping uproar. Reflecting upon it afterward, Brittany learns the truth inherent in the Biblical command to "love your neighbor as yourself, namely that a proper self-love is essential to loving someone else.

How Brittany repairs the social damage and emerges a more wholesome and likable human being makes this a rare summer comedy concerned with more than just eliciting laughter from its audience. There are lots of funny lines, such as Brittany's comment, "I tried to rescue a dog from a kill shelter – and they said I couldn't give it the future it deserves," but far more insightful actions on the part of the characters. And yes, in a year Brittany does run the marathon with her friends and a few thousand other runners. Various scenes of the athletes are so well filmed that this comedy could also qualify as a sports film—and like all good sports films, you will be cheering as Brittany and other runners struggle to stay in the race, almost as much as when a reborn Rocky ran up those steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum. Go Brittany, go!

This review will be in the September issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.