

After Esme
A Comedy in One Act
By
Kathryn West

After Esme

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Characters

The following characters are any age between 50-65.

Jenny	Smart, well turned out. Cares about her appearance.
Pauline	A put-upon grandmother, taken for granted by those around her.
Alice	Overweight, dissatisfied with herself.
Esme	<i>See note below</i>

Waitress (Scenes 1, 3 and 5) Approx. age 16-25.

The 3 cafes/restaurants in these scenes are different establishments, and therefore the waitress should be a different character in each scene.

Manageress Scene 1)	A different character in each scene. Should be of a similar age to the 4 women above.
Manageress Scene 3)	
Woman Scene 5)	

A note about Esme

The character of Esme should react to the world, people and conversations around her, but the world ignores her, because she is, in fact, dead. The only time she speaks and can be heard is at the bench with any one of her friends. Is she really there? Is she a ghost, or a presence, or a figment of their imagination? It is for the audience to draw their own conclusions about this. It is intended that the realisation of the 4th woman being Esme is a gradual process throughout the first 4 scenes, with everyone having realised after the reveal at the end of Scene 4.

It is therefore important that the audience are not forewarned of the identity of the '4th woman' until the script leads them there. For that reason, I would suggest great care when producing a cast list, programme, publicity material etc.

Staging

On one side of the stage is a table and 4 chairs, which can be re-dressed to represent the different restaurants. A table upstage centre with 2 chairs is for 'Woman' in scene 5, but can also be used in earlier scenes if required. The bench is downstage opposite the table. It is intended that actors can move between the scenes freely without the need to exit, unless the Director so desires.

/ denotes overlapping speech

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Scene 1

A café. Mid-morning. Jenny, Pauline and Esme are at a table. There are plates on table with cake on, plus mugs. There is another empty table further upstage. Jenny is scrolling through a dating app on her phone and the other 2 are watching. They are in high spirits.

Jenny: Any good? This one?

Pauline: Hang on a minute, let me get my glasses. *(She puts glasses on, looks at phone)* Oh no!

Jenny: *(swiping)* Him?

Pauline: No! *(Jenny keeps swiping)*. They're all fat...or bald....or fat *and* bald! *(Looks back at phone)* Ugh! Do we know if he's breathing?

The Manageress enters, goes to upstage table and inspects it. She hovers, listening disapprovingly to the women.

Jenny: This one?

Pauline: No! You can do better than that

Jenny: He'd probably be fine with his clothes off. He's got big.....hands

Pause. They all laugh

Pauline: What age group did you put in? Nearly dead? Go younger!

Jenny: Younger...right. *(More swiping)* What about him?

Pauline: Oh no!

Jenny: He's quite nice!

Pauline: What for?

Jenny: What do you mean 'what for'? What do you think for?

Pauline: No, seriously! Benefits or relationship?

They both take a good look at the phone

Jenny: You're right, neither

Pauline: Swipe left (*Jenny swipes right*). No! Left woman! Left!

Jenny: Oh God! You're getting me all in a tizz now. I never was good at left and right

Alice enters. She is out of breath and carrying the large handbag that accompanies her throughout the play

Alice: Sorry I'm late....(*There are general greetings, hugs etc.*) I had to go to my weigh-in...

The Waitress enters, Jenny signals her for attention, but she is ignored. The waitress goes to lay empty table

Alice: And then I decided to walk, you know, to try and get my 10,000 steps in, and it's a lot further than I thought.

Jenny: Well, never mind, we've not been here long..

Pauline: Hmmm....shame though, 'cause I have to be home in half an hour. I have to look after the boys while Mary takes Marigold to 'Messy Play'

Jenny: What on earth is 'messy play'?

Pauline: It's where the children play with messy things like mud and paints

Jenny: Huh! In my day that was just called 'play'

Alice: And it was free!

Pauline: Yes, well, things have changed since Victoria was on the throne....

Jenny: Charming! I'll have you know...

Alice: Alright you two, play nicely!

The waitress passes again. Alice and Esme both signal to her but are ignored again

Alice: You run around after Mary and those children far too much. Your life isn't your own.

Jenny: She's right. You need to think about yourself for a change. In any case, I would have thought those kids were old enough to send up chimneys by now...

Alice: (*Laughing*) Don't be mean, Jen

Jenny: Well, you know me. I don't really see the point of children...at least, not until they're old enough to clean the house...

They all laugh

Pauline: Anyway, how was weigh-in?

The Waitress enters and approaches

Alice: Oh, I've had a really good week! I've lost 0.2 kilograms.

Waitress: *(To Alice)* What can I get you, my love?

Alice: What cakes do you have?

Waitress: Chocolate torte, choc chip cookie cake, white chocolate mousse tart, chocolate swirl cake, death by chocolate, dark chocolate delight, vanilla cheesecake, erm.....*(thinking, consults notebook)*...

Alice: I'm not allowed chocolate

Pauline: Have the vanilla cheesecake then

Waitress:with chocolate honeycomb crumbs and a luscious dark chocolate sauce.

Alice: Have you got any carrot cake? *(Sotto voce to others)* Five a day.....

Jenny: It's called 'Chocolate Heaven'. That's why we came here, remember? They do the best chocolate cake in town...

Pauline: And Esme *loved* chocolate!

Alice: I know, but today's talk was about the evils of chocolate

Jenny: Do you remember that chocolate fountain she hired?

Pauline: Oh my God! Yes!

All the women squeal and laugh loudly at the shared memory

Waitress: We don't have carrot cake

Alice: Oh. Coffee and walnut?

Waitress: No

Alice: Victoria sponge?

Waitress: No

Alice: So what do you have?

Waitress: Chocolate torte, choc chip cookie cake, white chocolate mousse tart, chocolate swirl cake, death by chocolate, dark chocolate delight, vanilla cheesecake...

Jenny and Pauline:... with chocolate honeycomb crumbs and a dark chocolate sauce

Waitress: Luscious dark chocolate sauce

Alice: I'll have a skinny latte please

Waitress: Right. *(Starts to leave)*

Alice: ...and a death by chocolate

Waitress: Death by chocolate.....large or small?

Alice: Small....no, large.....no, small *(Pause)* And a chocolate chip cookie cake

Waitress: OK. Large or/ small?

Pauline: /Small! She'll have small!

Jenny and Esme laugh – this is familiar behaviour

Alice: And can you put *luscious* dark chocolate sauce on the choc chip cookie cake?

Waitress: I'll have to ask. Did you say large or...?

Pauline: Oh, for Chrissake! Small! Small cakes. Chocolate sauce. Latte.

Alice: Skinny latte

Pauline: And a SKINNY-FUCKING-LATTE!

Waitress: There's no need to shout... *(exits)*

Pause

Alice: I'm not sure what I'm getting now...*(indicating large piece of leftover cake on the table in front of Pauline)* Are you going to eat that?

Pauline: I'm full. I thought I'd take it back for the kids *(she starts to try and wrap it in a small napkin. Alice takes a large Tupperware box from her bag, opens it and takes out another, smaller box. She opens this and puts the cake in it)*

Pauline: Mind you, they'll fight over it...

Alice takes a silver cake slice out of her bag and carefully cuts the cake into 3 pieces, puts the lid on the box and hands it to Pauline. The other 3 women watch this as if there's nothing unusual about it at all. Alice returns the paraphernalia to her handbag. The Waitress returns with the latte and some cake.

Jenny: Excuse me?

Waitress: Yes, my love?

Jenny: Could I please have a hot chocolate? But I don't want any mushrooms on it.

Waitress: No mushrooms....right. *(She exits)*

Silence

Jenny: Did I say mushrooms? I meant marshmallows...

Alice: How much is 0.2 kilograms?

Jenny: Not sure. I think it's 2 pounds to a kilo. Or is it 2 kilos to a pound?

Pauline: Either way, 0.2 kilos is not very much

Alice: Well, it's something. Means I can afford to give myself a little treat.

Jenny: *(sarcastically)* Yay! Go girl!

The Waitress returns with a hot chocolate

Waitress: There you are

Jenny: Thanks. Did I say mushrooms? I meant marshmallows...

Waitress: *(wearily)* I know what you meant, my love

Pauline: Oh really, again? Do you have to address us as 'My love'?

Waitress: I'm just being friendly

Pauline: You don't need to be friendly, you need to be polite and respectful. Try 'Madam'

Waitress: Madam?

Pauline: Yes, 'Madam'

Waitress: Right, Madam *(turns and exits abruptly)*

Alice: Oh, Pauline...

Pauline: What?

Alice: That was a bit mean

Pauline: She was being patronising. 'My love' makes me feel ancient! It happens everywhere, and I'm sick of it!

The Café Manageress enters

Manageress: I will not tolerate aggressive behaviour towards my staff. Poor Katie is in tears

Jenny: Snowflake!

Manageress: Right, that's it! I must ask you to leave immediately

The following lines overlap as the women gather up their belongings and are ushered off the premises

Jenny: We didn't mean any harm

Pauline: Honestly! You can't say anything these days

Alice: She didn't mean anything by it

Jenny: Careful! Don't push!

Pauline: Total snowflake

Jenny: ...never coming here again

Pauline: Definitely won't be recommending you

The manageress ushers off Jenny, Pauline and Esme, who continue to ad lib their indignation. During this, Alice remains at the table. She takes out her large Tupperware box, tips all the cake into it, puts it back into her bag, takes a slurp of her latte, then exits after the others

To read the rest of this play, contact the author Kathryn West via the contact form, or read it at Lazy Bee scripts.