

Lovable, intimate inspirational story

Written by Adrienne Shelly

Directed by Adrienne Shelly

Keri Russell ... Jenna

Nathan Fillion ... Dr. Pomatter

Cheryl Hines ... Becky

Jeremy Sisto ... Earl

Andy Griffith ... Old Joe

Adrienne Shelly ... Dawn

*"Baby don't you cry, gonna make a pie,
gonna make a pie with a heart in the middle.
Baby don't be blue, gonna make for you,
gonna make a pie with a heart in the middle.
Gonna make a pie from heaven above,
gonna be filled with strawberry love.
Baby don't you cry, gonna make a pie,
and hold you forever in the middle of my heart."— Jenna*

Jenna (Keri Russell—no relation to Kurt) sings this tender little ditty a couple of times toward the end of the movie. It's a tune her mother taught her, sang to her, when she was a little girl growing up in a small town in the Deep South. As the credits for *Waitress* unfurl we see a young woman's hands making pie after pie full of scrumptious innards with moist, thick golden crusts, then we learn the woman's name is Jenna and she works for the local diner... which has a far and wide reputation for serving these hand-made pies "from heaven above."

In an early conversation with Jenna's two waitress friends, Becky (Cheryl Hines) and Dawn (Adrienne Shelly), we learn Jenna's life is going in a way that is anything but heavenly. She's married to Earl (a self-esteem-challenged mentally abusive husband played exactly right by *Six Feet Under's* Jeremy Sisto)—if Earl had a theme of his own it would be his car horn honking insistently several times on every occasion he comes to pick up Jenna from work. Then, of course, a microsecond after she climbs in the car she has to fork over all her tips for the day, which he complains are so paltry she may just have to quit and stay home... to take care of him as a fulltime project.

The other two waitresses, Becky and Dawn, are quirky, having their own set of problems, mainly men-related: Becky is married to an older man, who's an invalid and no longer gives her the excitement she craves, plus she worries, "Jenna, lookie here, at my right boob and my left boob, tell me the one isn't lower than the other." Dawn, more or less a wallflower in the dance of love, is nevertheless giving the personal ads a try, prevailing on the naturally attractive Jenna to help her prep for the next big date.

But the center of attention is Jenna and her recent predicament with Earl, exacerbated by the fear that she's pregnant: "Oh, I just hate it when I get drunk and do something stupid like having sex with my husband." Sure enough, based on a home pregnancy test performed with the moral support of her two dear friends at the diner, she appears to have conceived. To confirm the diagnosis, she visits the office of her family doctor. To Jenna's chagrin she finds the woman physician, who has been treating her since she was a child, is on permanent leave. A younger, rather self-conscious male doctor, Dr. Pomatter (Nathan Fillion), has taken the woman's place.

Well, I don't need to tell you what happens next, but the plot definitely thickens... like one of Jenna's sweet caramel and chocolate pies. As Jenna is struggling with her feelings about potential motherhood and how she feels about the new doctor, her home life seems to be going from bad to worse. The situation with Earl—which she has formerly enabled by her passivity—becomes comical in a grim-because-it's-all-too-common way. Your heart rises and falls with this poor girl who has a mystical, magical creative touch with

her pie-making and wants desperately to do the right thing... but also wants to find some sublime joy in life before it's too late.

Terrific, alternately funny then wrenching, performances by all concerned, especially from Andy Griffith^[1] who plays the well-to-do owner of the diner, Old Joe. His health and years are failing him. Joe puts on the face of a tough, mean, irascible guy who insists on sitting in the same booth every time and that Jenna serve him "just so." But we realize, as Jenna does, that Old Joe is a deep-down softy. And Joe truly feels Jenna is a heavenly creature, not only for her pies but for her valiant, poignant struggles with the traps she faces; he wishes he were younger, I'm sure.

Can't go much further without giving away how everything works out. Let's just say it's thought provoking. Moreover, it's a pro-woman movie without being anti-man. I suppose that's arguable, the part about being not being anti-man... but my own feeling is the men are drawn caringly along the unique vectors of maturity/immaturity that we know so well about the gender: each of the men act heroically or basely, depending on the circumstances, in the alien male universe. It's a universe that often doesn't seem to offer much for women seeking to have fulfilling lives of their own.

There's one scene between Jenna and the diner's owner, a man who never really treats any of the girls with respect, yet you know he does have feelings for them. This is the interchange between Jenna and Cal (Lew Temple):

Jenna: Cal, are you happy? I mean, when you call yourself a happy man, do you really mean it?

Cal: You ask a serious question, I'll give you a serious answer: Happy enough. I don't expect much. I don't get much, I don't give much. I generally enjoy whatever comes along. That's my answer for you, summed up for your feminine consideration. I'm happy enough.

However you slice it, *Waitress* is a big(-hearted), tasty pie of a movie. Four stars.

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[1] Many people are not aware that Andy Griffith hit a home run in his first major movie, Elia Kazan's 1957 masterpiece on the power and dangers of mass media, *A Face in the Crowd*. I was going to assert that he won the Oscar for his performance, but I'm not finding that to be the case in my Websearch. Anyone with information about that, please contact me on the forum. I know Elia Kazan was reviled in Hollywood at the time for caving in to the McCarthyites and submitting names of his friends to the prosecutors.

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Waitress | Keri Russell | Adrienne Shelly | *Men are from Mars*