

BERLIN KIND

Feature Proposal



What happens when you meet someone at the wrong time but also the right time?

Two souls seek solace in one another over the course of one night in Berlin, looking to forget the sense of loss they both face. But as their bond grows into something else, one's secretive nature threatens to break their connection.

An Indie Romantic Tragi-Comedy



2018. Esther, late twenties, runs for her train in the subway. But misses it. Damn. She's alone in the station. Until.

Paul struggles down the steps with a large, cumbersome suitcase.

He looks lost as he tries to make sense of the station names.

Esther: Are you lost?

Paul: I'm trying not to be.

She gives him directions. He's grateful. The conversation could end there. But she's curious. She asks him if he's leaving. He tells her he's just arrived. He asks her if she's from Berlin. She corrects his pronunciation. He smiles and takes that as a yes. There's a hint of a spark, but before they can talk, his train arrives. He mouths thank you to her. He clambers on to the train. She looks at him whilst he gets himself together on the train. But he's not looking back. As she turns her head he looks towards her. Misses.



On the train, Paul gets a phone call from his mum, who seemingly accuses him of running away from his problems. He snaps back at her that she doesn't have to visit him. It leaves him agitated and slightly embarrassed in front of the other passengers on the train who have witnessed it.

He looks to escape getting into a negative spiral by trying to read his book, *Norwegian Wood*. But no, he can't get into it. He's restless. He then illustrates a picture inspired by some of the passengers on the train and the conductor. This is his talent. But the conductor sees it. They don't look best pleased. Embarrassed again. Different country. Same Paul so far.



Whilst dashing to work. Esther sees a series of missed calls from her mom. She anguishes. She makes a phone call to the hospital and checks in on her. She's apparently fine. They ask Esther if she wants to leave a message. Esther declines and promptly hangs up.

Esther then makes another call, leaving a voicemail for a friend about meeting up in the evening. Then switches her mobile off.

Esther eventually makes it to work. A hipsterish cafe. Her colleague and boss, Holly, is not best pleased with her. By her expression, it's not the first time that she's running late. Esther tries to smooth it over by promising to be extra nice to customers to bring in extra tips. It wins her over, for now.

Paul arrives at his Airbnb, where the host's dog takes a particular liking to him by licking his face to almost no end. The host says the dog never does this to anyone. Paul jokes that the dog must smell the depression off him. He was trying to make a joke. She is troubled by the comment.

Paul asks what the dog's name is and gets a funny answer back. He starts to wonder if the owner might be racist. But it's she who is joking this time. It's awkward.

She asks him why he's moved to Berlin. He tells her that he felt his world was getting smaller. And needed a change.

As she is about to leave. She asks him not to kill himself in her home.
He thinks she's joking again. No, she's very serious.
He's getting a taste of how direct Germans are.

Paul promises that he won't.

She leaves him with the keys that might as well be a small anchor.





Esther stands behind the counter, looking forlorn, her head elsewhere. Until a tall, dark and handsome stranger breaks the spell. He flirts with her, and she's happy to play along. After asking him what he wants, he tells her anything that will make him remember the place. Holly overhears this, it's cringe. But Esther's hopes are dashed when the customer's whiny girlfriend turns up. Neither was expecting it. She asks for a frappuccino. Esther tells her they don't do that there. The boyfriend acts diplomatically to get her a Diet Coke. Esther's colleague teases Esther about what coffee she is going to make for the stranger so that he will never forget the place. Esther ponders.

Esther delivers a Diet Coke to their table and something that looks a lot like a frappuccino. A slightly sour day gets even worse when her ex-boyfriend Nikolai turns up to return some belongings. He asks her about how her mother is. She tells him he doesn't have the right to ask. He leaves in silence.

Paul arrives at the trendy-looking offices of his new job. When he speaks to the receptionist, he can tell something is up. The receptionist is anxious, and there's a lot of commotion in the background. He is greeted by his two bosses, who take him to a quiet office and sit him down. It's bad news.

They've lost funding because a former intern insulted someone on Twitter years ago. And they've had their investment pulled. So they're having to let people go. Even the ones that haven't even started for them yet. The actual flying fuck?! Paul is near speechless.

As Paul leaves the office, one of the bosses hands him a bottle of Jagermeister that was supposed to be a welcome present.

He fucking hates Jager.



As they close up shop, Holly has a dig at Esther for going out rather than trying to sort out her life. It's not what Esther needed to hear. She storms off.

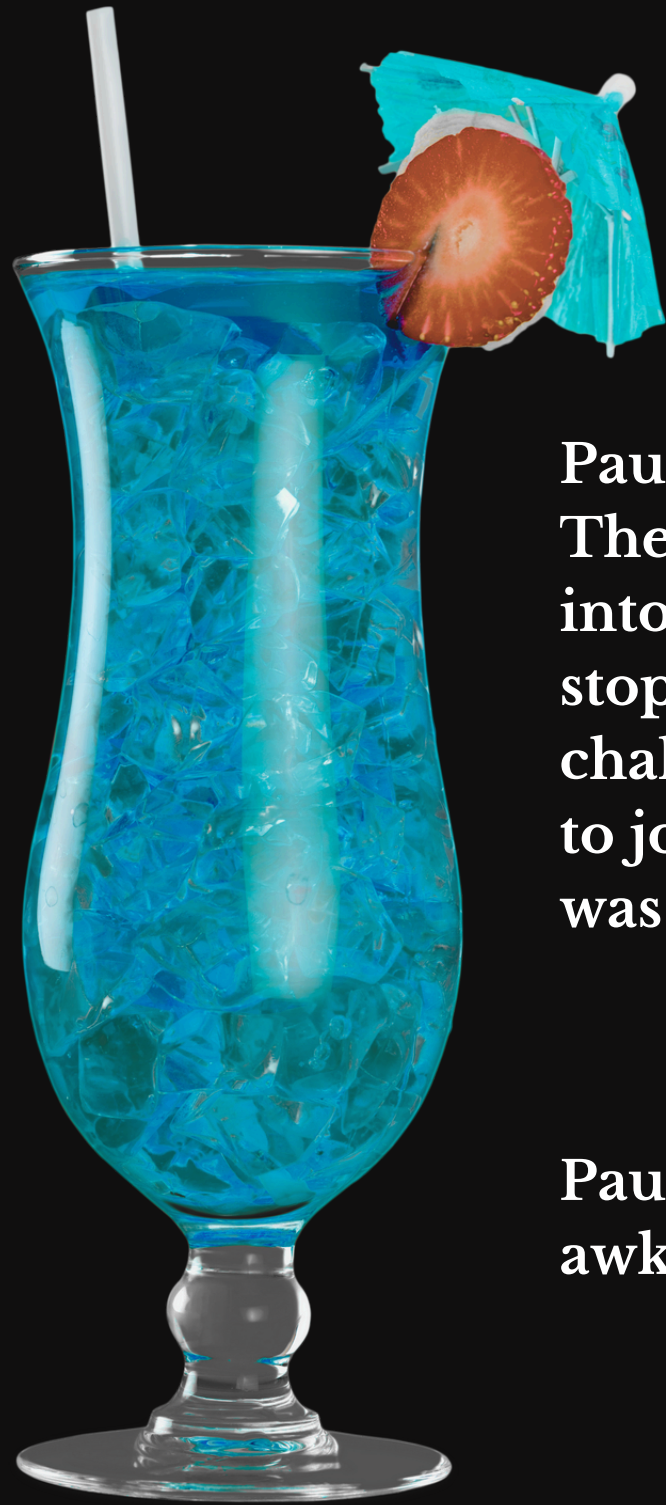
Inside a bespoke furniture shop, Nikolai, mid-forties, speaks to a customer. A milkshake smashes against the window, which shocks them both. Nikolai doesn't need to look as Esther storms down the road.



Shock. Anger. Despair. Paul's dream is turning into a nightmare. After crossing the road, a German dad, with his infant son, shouts at Paul for not waiting for the green man. He's getting the feeling that maybe Berlin doesn't want him.

He goes to drown his sorrows. Though seeing people in gatherings only reinforces the sense of loneliness he's trying to fight against. He looks up to the bar ceiling where furniture hangs upside down. Oh, the irony.

Feeling anxious and impulsive. Paul searches for flights back to the UK. Tempting. But it's not the time to give up.



Esther arrives at a fairly high-end bar to meet her friend. Initially it looks like she's not turned up. Esther doesn't need anymore shit. But her friend Mia surprises her. Mia's in a party mood as she's free from her feckless husband and demanding child. Esther's got some good company finally. Or so she thinks. Mia's child has had a minor accident, which has meant her having to leave early. Esther puts on a brave face but it hurts. There seems like there's nothing to help her escape. Until.

Paul is sipping on a ridiculous cocktail, reading his book and sticking out like a sore thumb. They lock eyes. She asks if he's still lost. Hard to say, he tells her. She invites him to join her. As she lays into him for looking desperate. Paul informs her that it has actually worked. She says she's using him to stop some guys at the bar from ogling her. Paul thinks it's a joke. But she could be telling the truth. She challenges him to help her get rid of them. He's hesitant. She's disappointed and leaves Paul at the table to join the two men. He's confused. Who is this woman? But he's gutted. deep down. He was hoping this was something.

Paul interrupts Esther and the suitors and tells them that he's tested positive for an STI, creating an awkward atmosphere. The suiters leave. Esther sees the funny side. This could be something.

But another curveball comes Paul's way. When a man approaches Esther, calling her another name. They clearly know each other. He's seemingly peeved that she's ghosted him. Paul can't take this. He's been messed around too much and leaves.

It's Esther's turn to run after Paul. She swears that she is being honest with him about who she is. Proves it by showing him her embarrassing photo I.D. Okay. She is who she says she is. But Paul says he's too fragile to be messed around. She gets it. She's feeling vulnerable herself. And was hoping to find comfort in a stranger. And was hoping that it could be him.

He gives in. He's willing to see where the night goes. Esther borrows two bikes from some friends. She's going to show him the Berlin he's not seen before.

And she's not wrong. Paul's getting a feeling for the city and an experience you won't get anywhere else. Paul is mesmerised by a Berlin he's not seen yet. Cycling around the city's bustling neighbourhoods, they pass protestors railing against a big corporation moving into a building and glide around an abandoned airport. It's making an impression on him.





Under the canopy of Berlin's S-Bahn, Paul and Esther snack at one of Berlin's iconic eating spots. Esther probes him about his drawings. He acts all modest. She jokes about how she would be able to tell her connections about a new artist if he won't show her. He claims no one will be interested in his silly drawings and that they're hardly going to change the world. She can see his low self-esteem coming through. She says he doesn't have to change the world; even just giving people a little bit of joy has value. He perks up. And reluctantly shows her. She doesn't give much away. He tells her that his style isn't for everyone. There's a lot of satire in his work. She doesn't say that she doesn't like them.

He takes his work back and asks her where they are going to go next. She tells him that she has to return the bikes. He's secretly gutted. He thinks he's bummed her out with his negativity. Thinking the evening might be coming to an end.

Though returning the bikes goes sideways, literally, as Paul crashes after going over a tram line the wrong way. He's hurt his hand. It doesn't seem broken. But it's painful. It's not worth going to hospital according to Esther. She's got another idea to help with the pain.

She takes them to a bar where she gets a champagne bucket full of ice for Paul to put his hand in. He looks and feels, ridiculous. Esther has also made a deal with the barman that if Paul can draw them a witty bar sign they'll get free drinks. It's not Paul's bag. But Esther insists and creates him an Instagram page. He mocks her for trying to be his muse.

But maybe, it's her attempt to get him to stay.





As they walk from one destination to the next, Paul's eyes light up at the sight of some outdoor market stalls. He's like a kid in a sweetshop. He flips through a crate of CD's and finds a copy of the first ever CD he ever bought; Semisonic's Feeling Strangely Fine. Esther doesn't quite get his nerdiness. He says he can remember every CD, where and when he bought them. Esther claims she's never heard of them. He can't believe it. Somewhat anxiously, sings, quite badly, Closing Time. She laughs and reveals she knew it all along. He reveals that music was one of his early passions and that he originally wanted to be a DJ. She asks him why he didn't. He doesn't know why. Another thing that just slipped by. He claims that he still makes the best playlists and that he can improve Esther's life by 10 per cent. She doesn't believe him. He hands her his earphones. He plays a song. Thrash hardcore metal music blasts out, and she rips out the earphones. Sweet revenge for making him sing.

They move on to another stall with a guy selling custom-made t-shirts. Paul admires the designs. A slightly frail-looking woman approaches the vendor with a t-shirt and speaks in German. Esther looks uncomfortable. Paul has no idea what is going on or being said. He asks Esther. She tells him that the woman is asking if she can return the shirt because she bought it for her boyfriend, but found out he was cheating on her. The vendor says it's not a legitimate reason to return it. The woman looks deeply upset and troubled. Esther steps up and tells the woman she'll buy the shirt from her. She asks if Paul is her boyfriend. Esther says no. She agrees and takes Esther's money. She then gives Esther a big hug and walks away. Esther gives Paul the shirt. He tells her that's the kindest thing he's ever seen.

He then goes to the vendor if he can swap it for another design. He gets a stern look in return.



Esther's plan of creating an instagram page for Paul pays off as other bar's get in touch for his skills. The effects of more alcohol leaves Paul starving . Esther takes them to a Korean restaurant where a really drunk party of Koreans are in high spirits. When Esther goes to the toilet, Paul has a conversation on the phone to someone. Revealing he's scared that Esther will see through him by the end of the night.

As Esther returns she tells Paul that there's a drunk girl passed out in the toilet from the Korean party and asks him to help her down. Paul looks to the Korean party, they're not going to help. Paul brings the girl down and returns her to her friends. They look cofused. And burst out laughing. Taking photos of her. Paul and Esther look at each other, must be a cultural thing.

Esther asks Paul whom he was talking to when she was away. He's almost sheepish with his answer. He tells her it was his best friend. But something about his answer almost doesn't ring true. He confesses that his best friend took his own life a few years ago. They had briefly fallen out, and he feels like he wasn't there for him when he needed him. He still has conversations with him. And the reason he carries the book around is that it reminds him of his friend. Before he can say more, she kisses him.

The moment is punctuated when an angry Korean girl admonishes the drunken party and lifts the drunk girl up. The boozy Koreans point to Paul laughing, and it becomes apparent that the drunk girl is not with them. Ooft. That's embarrassing. Time to leave.

Paul and Esther wander around a surrealist art exhibition of repurposed themed mannequin dolls. They speak to the eccentric, cheery artist Ross, who thinks they are a couple. Esther tries to big up Paul as an artist. But Paul is dismissive of himself as an artist and corrects Ross that they're a couple. Although they're obviously not a couple, it hurts Esther. Ross pulls Paul aside to chastise him for not seeing that she's into him and to pull his head out of his arse or face the feeling of regret in the future.

He's right. Paul returns to Esther to apologise and tell her that he likes her. But before he can, she states that she needs to take the bikes back. He doesn't get it. Something's not right. But he agrees anyway.





They return to the apartment block where they picked up the bikes. Paul tries to get Esther to talk. She begs him to keep quiet. He asks her why she's upset. She says because she wants him to stay. He says he doesn't know if she's been telling the truth to him about who she really is.

A door from above opens. A man steps out and calls out Esther's name, asking what the hell is going on that he called the police about the missing bikes? Nikolai. His new young girlfriend steps out, pregnant.

Paul starts to understand it all. He wasn't the only one trying to forget or escape. Esther begs for forgiveness. He almost does, but then her phone goes off. He's surprised as she claimed she didn't have one. It's the final straw and leaves.

Angry. Paul throws his bag into a river. But then remembers his apartment key is in it. He dives into the river to retrieve it. But he can't find it. He climbs to the embankment and sees his book floating in the water. Dawns on him that he needs to be bigger than himself.

He returns to the street where he left Esther. He finds her in floods of tears. She tells him to fuck off. He says that he can't. The last time he wasn't there for someone was the worst mistake of his life. Esther says that he'll think she's a monster. He tells her he won't judge.

Esther reveals that her mother is in the hospital. That she wasn't speaking to her until she revealed who her father is. The phone call was to tell Esther that she has hours to live.

Paul tells her she has to get past her anger or she'll regret it for the rest of her life.

She asks him if he can go with her to the hospital.

He will.





They arrive at the hospital. Paul leaves Esther to see her mother, Uma. She's frail and on a ventilator. A nurse helps to offer to dry Paul's clothes. Esther and Uma apologise to each other. Uma instructs Esther to join her in bed. They cuddle up. Uma says she knows it's hurting her daughter not knowing who her father is and asks her for her forgiveness. Esther nods. Uma starts to sing *If We Hold on Together* by Diana Ross. Esther joins in. It's a song they've sung together a thousand times.

Paul waits and dries off in the waiting area. He never saw this coming. Esther comes out to see him. She asks Paul if he can keep her mom talking while she grabs a coffee. He agrees.

Paul sits with Uma. Uma jokes that he must be terrified that she'll die in front of him. He is. Uma asks Paul about him. He confesses that he thinks he's in Berlin because he thinks he's lost. But Uma tells him he's exactly where he needs to be. That the universe brought him here so that he would bring Esther to her. Uma asks Paul to keep an eye out for her daughter when she's gone. He says she will. Not realising that Esther is at the door. He leaves them together.

Esther wakes Paul in the waiting room. Her mum passed in her sleep. It's time to go.



They ride back in a taxi together in silence. They arrive at Paul's apartment. Esther tells him that she needs time to get herself together. He nods. He tells her it might not have been the right time to meet. But it wasn't the wrong time either.

He gets out and watches the taxi disappear into the distance. As he turns to enter his apartment, he realises that he lost the front door key. But the worst of all. He never got Esther's phone number. He can only laugh.

Paul calls his mum to apologise. And wants her to come visit him soon.

DIRECTOR BEN MALLABY

2 X BAFTA NOMINATED COMEDY DIRECTOR

Ben Mallaby's *Please Help*, produced by Tiger Aspect and written by/ starring Lucy Pearman was nominated for a BAFTA for Best Short Form Programme in 2022. [Available on iPlayer](#)

He also directed two seasons of *Climaxed* for BBC3 with Tiger Aspect and has directed shows for ITV2 and Comedy Central.

He has well over a million views on Vimeo for his shorts, including three Staff Picks and a number of Short of the Week premieres. His shorts have played at festivals such as the London Film Festival and Palm Springs. He was nominated for a BAFTA for Best Short Film in 2014 with his film *Island Queen*. [Available on iTunes.](#)

As [BARBARA](#) Ben is represented for commercials and branded content by [MERMAN](#) alongside his directing partner Rachel Stubbings.

MALLABY.CO.UK



Director's Statement

I'll say it, Before Sunrise is my favourite genre.

There's something about the pure romance of a chance encounter, the joy of meeting someone and connecting in an intense way, and I guess, the grief at never knowing what could have happened if they'd stayed together. Well we do know thanks to Before Midnight, the same old shit everyone else goes through.

The first short film I made out of university was a similar story, two people meeting at random and deciding to go to Vienna for a mad weekend. The ingredients are clear to me, you have to travel, you have to have something you're leaving, and something you're finding.

The goal with Berlin Kind is to capture that magic, the chemistry of two perfect performances sizzling and bustling their way through a perfect night. The casting is everything, and I hope to fill the roles with two exciting emerging talents. Berlin is our third character, we'll shoot around many popular hotspots, thankfully at night, and fill the shots with the light and colour that comes from an active nightlife. We'll add a little gloss with an emphasis on a strong backlight and soft key, to keep everyone looking their best. Imagine cycling over wet cobble streets, bridges over rivers, and hot August nights in a vibrant city with a stranger you're madly in love with.

Writer's Statement

Chris Aitken

Berlin Kind is a culmination of different experiences I have had when visiting and living in Berlin. I properly fell in love with the city for the first time when a Berlin-based friend took me cycling around it. I've always wanted to pay homage to that experience and to try and show why Berlin is a magical place and different to other cities. Equally, I wanted to balance it out with some of the experiences that happened to me that made it hard when I came to live in Berlin. Most of the events in the script are lifted from actual experiences, even when they might feel quite sitcom-like. Thus shares some kinship with one of my all-time favourite films, Sideways. So there's the good and the bad. Celine Song's Past Lives helped me to reprise this script, not because of its success, but feeling more comfortable about drawing on my own personal experiences to help form large parts of the script.

When you have ADHD and mental health issues, it's easy to be guilty of navel-gazing and not seeing other people's problems. Thus, he struggles to see that Esther needs to find that reason to escape more than he does. The story is ultimately about feeling lost and dealing with loss, but a reminder that finding the right people and the kindness of strangers can make the world feel like a place worth living in.

It's only more recent I've come to understand how much my ADHD or ADHD impacts people's lives. I think the only portrayal is just seeing people being hyperactive, rather than seeing experiences of anxiety, restlessness, impulsivity, low self-esteem, constant over-thinking and at times lack of awareness. Constantly striving for something but never knowing what we really want. These things are not the most apparent things to get across on screen and are probably less obvious to people who are neurotypical.

Before Sunrise and Lost In Translation are key references. I've always wanted to write a film of that ilk, as they've always had a place in my heart. Where we just want to spend time with the characters being together rather than being governed by a strict plot or structure. But hopefully this still stands on its own two feet.

I think we're in a particular fractious period around the world with the rise of extremism. So I think it perhaps feels particularly important to re-emphasise the importance and power of kindness.



Paul

A pessimist trying to pass off as an optimist until the world around him starts to crash down. His life feels like it's in a constant whirlwind of chaos and is always in his head. A classic cluster fuck, but just wants the world to be a better place and for him to find his place in it.

Elusive; mysterious and sarcastic. Although a true optimist, is in a really tricky period of her life navigating a break up and her mum's illness whilst trying to find out who her father is that's left her feeling un-whole and wanting to escape from herself.

Esther





WHO IS IT FOR?

For anyone that needs these films in their lives.





The Playlist

Wildblood
by
Caspian

Connection
by
Jambinai

Anatomy of a Scattered Night
by
Boy Android

Spotify Playlist link

New Orleans Instrumental No.1
by
R.E.M.

Lose You
by
Winter

Bre
by
Open Hand

WHO ARE RESTLESS NATIVE PRODUCTIONS?



RNP are a relatively new Scottish independent production company from Chris Aitken. He is the founder and director of the heralded BAFTA qualifying short comedy film festival Short Com that champions the best funny films by emerging comedy filmmaking, writing and performing talent. He is also an MA screenwriter who has had several of his scripts made by award-winning and BAFTA-nominated directors. As well as working with award-winning comedy talent. He has been in development with the BBC Comedy department and considered for a pilot as the only unknown in the mix. He has also reached the interview stage for the Film London Microwave First Feature Scheme. He also has experience as a script reader, reading for production companies and financiers, performing coverage on scripts from Hollywood and Oscar-winning talent. He is also neurodiverse (I mean, it's probably obvious by now) from a working-class background that seeks to give those who face similar obstacles opportunities in the film and TV industry.

At the advice of a BBC Comedy commissioner. He was encouraged to start his own production company in Scotland. He was a recipient of the BBC Small Indie Fund to help start up the company. Since then, RNP has been commissioned to make several sketches for BBC Scotland with emerging comedy talent. Two of his sketches have been selected to be published on the BBC iPlayer, and his film *Da's* had a successful international festival run. Being selected for Academy Qualifying Holly Shorts and USA Today's Best Voted New Festival Salute Your Shorts. Where he was the only British filmmaker selected for the festival.

The mission and ethos of RNP is to make stories for films and TV with a cinematic lens, which punch above their weight, transport audiences by taking them to a better place.

Our mission isn't to make the best film in the world. But hopefully someone's favourite.



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