

A SIMPLE ACT

19-DE01-W03

Logline:

When a dying teen interrupts a neighborhood friend's suicide plan, she risks her life to convince him to live.

FADE IN:

INT. THE WATER'S HOUSE - ABBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

ABBY WATERS, 17, a pale, thin teen with a soft cap on her head, struggles for strength as she crawls out of bed. She frowns toward dance posters and a shelf of trophies.

She winces as she scratches one of the skin sores on her arm. A KNOCK on the door. She quickly puts on a hoodie as SUSAN WATERS, 40s, a woman in mom-jeans and a poofy perm, walks in and hands Abby a letter.

Abby rips it open and her eyes skim it. "...you were not chosen for the scholarship this year." She crumples it up and tosses it on the floor.

ABBY
I'm tired of fighting.

SUSAN
God will provide.

Abby shrugs as she looks out the window at two birds competing for seeds on the ground.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
How about I make chocolate chip
pancakes?

ABBY
I'm not hungry.

SUSAN
You have to keep your strength up
for the next round of chemo--

ABBY
I can't... go through it again.

SUSAN
Dr. Bradford said it's your best
chance--

ABBY
--Why can't God heal me already?

SUSAN
He will. I know He has big plans
for you.

Susan shuts the door. Abby tears up as she looks at one picture of her in a sparkly dance uniform. She grabs a Bible on the nightstand and throws it in a bottom drawer.

INT. THE CLARK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

PETER CLARK, 50s, a man with a scruffy-beard, frowns toward the fridge at a picture of himself, HIS WIFE, and BEN. Dozens of sympathy cards fill the front of the fridge.

BEN CLARK, 20, a forlorn youth wearing baggie clothes, saunters in. Peter grabs his travel coffee mug and points to a paper on the counter, "Taco Bell Job Application."

PETER

All the double deckers you want for free. It'll save me a bundle.

BEN

They don't make those anymore.

PETER

You can't mope around the house forever.

Ben stares off, deep in thought.

BEN

Don't worry, I won't.

Ben looks at the dog-tags around his neck. He feels them between his fingers and sighs.

PETER

I miss her, too, Son.

Peter pats him on the back and walks toward the door.

BEN

Dad? Thanks for never giving up on me.

PETER

I expect the same when I'm old and grey.

Ben looks toward the floor as Peter walks out the door. The clock TICKS as Ben pulls out a HANDGUN from his waist.

He maneuvers the gun and feels the weight in his hand. He slowly brings the gun to his temple, takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

He PULLS THE TRIGGER.

It CLICKS - not loaded. He releases his breath. He pulls out three bullets from a pocket and loads them, one by one. He pulls out a folded, handwritten note with the word, "Dad" on the front. He puts it on the table.

He spots a black briefcase on the table. He blocks the gun with his body as his eyes dart anxiously toward the door. He places the gun in the front waistline of his pants and grabs the briefcase.

EXT. THE WATER'S HOUSE - DAY

Susan retrieves a newspaper as she spots Peter near a parked car. Ben rushes down the sidewalk, briefcase in hand.

EXT. THE CLARK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Peter smiles as he takes the briefcase from Ben.

PETER

You know you can talk to me about anything, right?

Ben shrugs. Peter pulls Ben in for a hug, Ben's waist comes dangerously close to touching Peter's when--

--Ben jerks away from Peter and steps back. He feels for the gun in his waistband and sighs with relief. His eyes raise and meet Peter's disappointed look.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm always here for you.

Peter hops in the car. Ben shakes his head as he walks toward the front door. Susan catches his glance and waves. He stares back at her blankly, deep in thought as he hurries inside.

INT. THE WATER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Abby slides her feet on the floor listlessly and sits on a barstool. Susan places the lid on a Tupperware container full of red and green decorated gingerbread cookies.

SUSAN

Why don't you bring these cookies to Ben? I tried my best to follow his mom's recipe.

ABBY
Can't you do it?

SUSAN
Didn't you used to have a crush on
him?

ABBY
That was third grade!

SUSAN
Still, you've seen how much he's
been struggling. I'm sure he could
use a familiar face.

ABBY
I'm not exactly in the best
position to help anyone.

SUSAN
Just be you. That's enough.

Susan forces the cookies into Abby's arms and smiles.

EXT. THE CLARK'S HOUSE - DAY

Abby sighs as she KNOCKS on the door, cookies in hand. Ben
cracks the door open and peeks out with one eye.

ABBY
Hi, Ben. Uh, these are from my Mom.

He opens the door wider. His red eyes avoid her glance. One
hand shakes as he grabs the Tupperware container with it.

She spots a gun in his other hand. They lock eyes and his
face turns red. He juggles the cookies as he closes the door--

--But Abby sticks her hand in the door. Her heart races as
she pushes the door with all of her strength. Ben slams the
door harder--

--It pinches her hand. She winches and pulls it out. Ben
opens the door with a look of worry and annoyance.

BEN
Are you okay?

A cut bleeds on her hand. Ben sighs and opens the door.

INT. THE CLARK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Multiple pictures of BEN'S MOM in an Army uniform are framed on the wall next to a dozen thank-you letters.

Ben tosses the cookies on the couch and walks to the next room as Abby looks at the memorabilia on the wall. He returns with a band-aid and places the gun in his waist-band.

ABBY

I'm sorry for your loss.

BEN

Like I haven't heard that before.

She rolls up the sleeve of her hoodie. Ben stares at the sores on her arm as he opens the band-aid.

ABBY

People try to support you the best way they can.

He gently sticks it on her hand and presses down.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Sometimes, it's not enough.

Ben moves the dog-tags between his fingers and shrugs.

BEN

I'm tired of trying to live without her.

ABBY

I know, but a gun? This isn't like you.

BEN

Maybe you never knew me at all.

ABBY

You were the hopeful kid. Heck, you inspired me most of the time.

Ben pulls out the gun and motions toward the door.

BEN

Thanks for coming by.

Abby walks toward the wall and sees a set of medals near the thank you letters.

ABBY

Wow, these are from the people your
mom saved?

Ben nods and rubs his face with his free hand.

ABBY (CONT'D)

At the funeral, they said dozens of
kids still have their parents
because of her.

BEN

Good for them.

ABBY

You should be proud.

Ben scoffs as he pulls out a handwritten note from his pocket
with the word "Dad" on it. He tapes the note to the glass of
a framed U.S. flag folded in a triangle.

ABBY (CONT'D)

I know things are changing.
Nothing's the same since my
diagnosis--

BEN

--It's not the same thing.

ABBY

It's loss, isn't it?

Abby's smile fades and she looks off to the side.

ABBY (CONT'D)

People tell me I'm brave because
I'm going through chemo. Somehow,
that's supposed to make me a
stronger person. Most days, I don't
feel brave at all. I can barely
even get out of bed.

He rubs his head, gun in hand.

BEN

What do you want, a medal? Take
one. Heck, take all of them.

Abby steps away from him in frustration.

ABBY

I would give anything to be young
and healthy. Don't take that for
granted.

BEN
You don't know my pain!

ABBY
You don't know mine. If you want to
throw away your life, go ahead.

Abby walks toward the door.

BEN
Sometimes, I can't stand because my
legs shake.

Abby stops in her tracks and turns to face him.

BEN (CONT'D)
Or I wake up and I can't breathe
from the nightmares. My heart
pounds and feels like it never
stops. How do I live with that?

ABBY
You find a way.

Ben COCKS THE GUN.

ABBY (CONT'D)
I'm not doing chemo again. Not sure
how long I've got. But you still
have a chance. There's no honor in
dying like a coward.

BEN
I'm not a coward!

He punches the wall - HARD. The flag falls off the wall and
the glass shatters. The note crinkles under it.

Ben kneels and grabs the flag, cutting his hand on the glass.
Some drops of blood stain the flag as he cradles it like a
baby, gun in hand.

BEN (CONT'D)
I should have been there to protect
her. I was planning to enlist when
this happened. For once, I wanted
the chance to make her proud.

ABBY
You still can. But not like this.

Ben sets down the flag gently. He points the gun at Abby.

BEN

Maybe, I should do us both a favor.

Ben walks toward Abby and presses the gun to her forehead.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'm willing to end this pain right now. Are you?

Abby searches her thoughts and stares at the gun. Her breathing quickens. She shakes her head, "no."

ABBY

I... want to live. No matter how hard it is. The good, the bad. There's still beauty in all of it.

BEN

Who's the coward now?

Abby gulps. Ben points the gun to his temple.

ABBY

She... she was proud of you.

Ben places his head in his hands. Abby steps closer.

ABBY (CONT'D)

You've always been my hero. I still remember you climbing down that big ol' tree with my cat. No ladder, nothing. Your mom had the biggest grin on her face.

Abby smiles in remembrance.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Sometimes, you're a hero climbing down. Sometimes, you're stuck in a tree.

She holds out her hand towards him.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Climb down with me.

A tear falls as he slowly lowers the gun. He hands it to her and collapses on the floor. Abby looks at the gun. She uncocks it and sets it on a shelf. She kneels beside him, grabs his hand, and squeezes it. They lock eyes.

INT. THE WATER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Abby walks in as Susan cooks two grilled cheese sandwiches.

ABBY
Smells good. I'm starving.

Susan's eyes light up. Abby beams.

SUSAN
I take it Ben is okay?

ABBY
He will be. We both will.

INT. THE CLARK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben looks at the handwritten note. He sticks it deep in between the crevice of the folded flag and sets it on a stack of empty moving boxes against the wall, next to his mother's picture. He pulls down a thank you letter and skims the page.

INT. THE CLARK'S HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben holds out a clasped hand toward Peter. He drops a few unspent bullets in Peter's hand and hands him the gun.

Peter's eyes widen as Ben speaks inaudible words. Peter pulls Ben into a tight hug.

SUPER:

3 MONTHS LATER

EXT. THE WATER'S HOUSE - DAY

Susan opens the door to find Ben, in an Army uniform, holding up a Tupperware container, full of fresh gingerbread cookies.

INT. THE WATER'S HOUSE - ABBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Several flower bouquets sit around the room. Ben takes off his hat as Susan leads him inside. Abby, paler than before, uses all of her strength to push herself to sit up in bed.

A Bible sits on the nightstand next to her. Ben holds up the cookies and shrugs as Susan steps out.

BEN

I tried to follow Mom's recipe.

Abby uses all her strength to push herself up. She smiles as she looks at his uniform.

BEN (CONT'D)

I just got back from boot camp.
Wouldn't have happened without you.

ABBY

I'm happy for you, Ben.

BEN

Thanks. Dad and I started a
scholarship in my mother's name. We
want you to be the first recipient.

He hands her a framed certificate. Abby's face lightens for a moment as her eyes scan the pages. She looks off to the side, her face filling with doubt.

ABBY

If I make it that long...

Ben sits on the side of the bed and grabs her hand.

BEN

You will.

Abby sees two birds out the window. She looks at Ben's resolute glance. Her face glows as she smiles.

FADE OUT.

ON BLACK:

Jeremiah 1:7-8

But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." ESV