A SMALL, SIMPLE KINDNESS

By Bradley Walton

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SYNOPSIS: Every day, we’re surrounded by negativity. News headlines scream for our attention with ugly stories about terrible things, and social networking enables everyone to complain about everything. It’s easy for small, good things to get lost in the shuffle. But they matter. Because you don’t have to rescue a child from a burning building or cure a disease to have a positive impact on someone’s life. All it takes is *A Small, Simple Kindness*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(1 either; gender flexible)*

NARRATOR (m/f) ....................................... A sheltered, middle-class teenager from a good home.

SETTING: Bare stage.

COSTUMES: Nice casual clothing.

AUTHOR NOTES

I have heard, on more than one occasion, rounds of serious dramatic interpretation described as one story of rape or death after the other. Admittedly, it’s serious dramatic interpretation, so there are going to be a lot of those kinds of things. And yes, I have written my fair share of monologues having to do with death. And I have no doubt that I will write more in the future. But as a response to that observation, I felt challenged to write something that was positive without being dark, depressing, or gross. This script is the result.
NARRATOR: Everybody has a story. If it’s about battling an addiction or a disease, or going through some kind of terrible experience, then most people would probably think it’s an interesting story. The more awful things get, the more the audience is usually drawn in. And sometimes people think that because a story is about something horrible, it must be a good story. Stories about small acts of kindness don’t scream for our attention like those other stories. But what they can do is inspire us and give us hope. So that’s the kind of story I’m going to tell. Not because it’ll make you cry or squirm in your seat, but because small, good things...they matter. First, though, I need to tell you a little about myself. I come from a middle class family. I make good grades, and I don’t get into trouble. My parents are happily married to each other. We live in a pretty nice house. And nobody close to me has ever died. I’m really lucky and I know it. If you’re cynical, you might think I’m spoiled. Up until a couple of months ago, I’d have said you were wrong.

For most of my life, I never had empathy for other people’s problems. I had sympathy, sure. One of my friends, his grandmother died, and I felt bad for him. Another one of my friends, his dad was laid off, and they lost their home. I felt bad for them, too. But I didn’t feel any compulsion to try to help them or make them feel better. I didn’t offer a shoulder to cry on or say, “Hey, let’s go to a movie. My treat.” If anything, I sort of kept those friends at a distance because I was uncomfortable being around their problems. I’d never had real problems, so I didn’t have any empathy for people who did. I just couldn’t relate. So yeah, I was spoiled. But then this thing happened. It was really small, but to me, it was important. I’m not going to say that it changed me in some huge way, because it didn’t. But it made me realize that I wanted to be a better person.
My big thing is, I love to read. That probably makes me a huge
nerd, but I don’t care. I love books. Actual, physical books that I
can hold in my hands and feel the paper when I turn the pages. I
blow all my allowance on books every month. Science fiction.
Fantasy. Suspense. Graphic novels. All kinds of stuff. And I read
fast. I go through way more than what my allowance covers, so I
borrow a lot of books from my school library. Anyway, my three
favorite authors all had new novels coming out the same month. In
hardcover. I only had enough allowance money to buy
two...meaning I was going to have to wait a whole extra month for
one of them. Which I did not want to do. Now normally, the school
library wouldn’t be a good source for instant gratification on a new
book—they only buy stuff a couple times a year. But one of these
was an exception. It was the third volume of a really popular series.
Tons of students were dying to get their hands on it, so the library
had placed a special order to get two copies on the day the book
came out, and they were going to rush them through processing, so
they’d be ready to circulate when school was over that afternoon.
They weren’t doing any advance holds, so if I wanted a copy, I had
to be there as soon as the bell rang.

My last class is one floor up from the library, at the opposite end of
the building. When the bell rang, I ran—literally, ran—through the
hall and down the stairs. By the time I got to the library, I was totally
out of breath. I charged in and went to the circulation counter,
where another student was in the process of checking out a copy of
the book I wanted. I panicked a little, but the librarian knew what I
was after, and she pointed at a small display table beside the
window. There was the other copy. I grabbed it. I felt absolutely
victorious. Thrilled out of my mind. I put the book down on the
circulation desk and slid it toward the librarian as if I was claiming a
winning lottery ticket. The librarian typed my name into the
computer, squinted at the screen, then looked at me with a sad little
frown, and said, “I’m afraid you have an overdue fine of thirty cents.”
I stared at the librarian like she had a tree growing out of her head.
An overdue fine? I’d brought back my last book a little late, but I’d
thought for sure it was in the grace period. Apparently, I’d been
wrong.
The librarian smiled sympathetically and told me not to stress about it. I just needed to pay the fine before I checked anything else out. But I didn’t have any money with me. I didn’t usually need money at school, so I never brought any. I couldn’t get the book. I asked the librarian if she could hold it for me, but she said no; too many people wanted it, and she couldn’t let the book sit behind the counter. I couldn’t believe it. My plans were getting blown to smithereens because of a thirty cent fine. Someone else was sure to get the book. I’d have to wait days, maybe weeks to read it. Now, I understand that in the cosmic scheme of things, this was a very minor deal. There are wars. Sickness. Starvation. And here I was with a totally first world problem. And I knew it. But it was still devastating. And I know that’s a really strong word for such a tiny thing, but that’s how it felt.

And then behind me a voice said, “here,” and a girl I didn’t know leaned in front of me and put a quarter and a nickel down on the circulation desk. I looked at the two coins and then at her. I’d seen her face around school, but…I didn’t know her. After a second or two, I stammered out a very surprised-sounding, “thanks.” She shrugged and said it was no big deal. The librarian cleared my account. I thanked the girl again and left the library. Even though I’d been completely focused on the book and my big moment of triumph less than two minutes before, my mind kept replaying the image of her hand putting my overdue fine on the counter. She’d helped me. Something bad was happening, and a complete stranger had helped me.

That thought stayed with me as I read the book over the next couple of evenings. When I got my allowance the next month, I went out and bought a copy. Not to own the book for its own sake, but because of what the book made me feel. It made me remember my sense of despair, and how that despair was suddenly lifted away by the small kindness of a stranger. It didn’t turn me into a crusading Samaritan or a social activist, but it did make me more sensitive to other peoples’ problems, and it made me want to be the kind of person who does something to help when they can.
It was a small, simple kindness. And the girl responsible probably forgot about it before she went to bed that night. But even though it wasn't a big deal to her...it was a really big deal to me, and I'll never forget it.

THE END