

## A Simple Favour (2018) Feig

P Michell, 2020

### Synopsis:

*The movie is directed by Paul Feig (who previously [worked on](#) Freaks and Geeks as well as The Heat) and stars Kendrick as Stephanie, a [mommy blogger who attempts to figure out the disappearance](#) of her new friend Emily, portrayed by Lively. In the process, Stephanie discovers that Emily [isn't exactly who she said she was](#), and loses her grip on her own sanity. Henry Golding from Crazy, Rich Asians co-stars as Lively's husband, Sean, in a tale that grows increasingly twisty with each turn.*

*Stars [Anna Kendrick](#), [Blake Lively](#), [Henry Golding](#), [Andrew Rannells](#), [Linda Cardellini](#), [Rupert Friend](#), and [Jean Smart](#).*

A Simple Favor was released in the United States in 2018. Critics praised the plot twists, and the performances of Kendrick, Lively and Golding. The film grossed \$97 million worldwide on a \$20 million budget.

Amy Nicholson of [Variety magazine](#) wrote: "The film feels a lot like the [Serge Gainsbourg number](#) that Stephanie dances to in the kitchen: jazzy, a little sleazy, and worth a cult following."

### SOME CREATIVE PERSONELL

Paul Feig – Director (27 credits)

Producer, Director, Writer, Music, Actor (51 credits), Music

Has seven productions currently in progress!

Pronounced Feeg. Graduated from USC School of Cinema-Television. Worked as a tour guide at Universal Studios.

Feig used to do stand-up (comedy) and says he puts his movies together like he used to do his shows. He screens them multiple times, keeping the jokes that get big laughs and reworking those that don't.

Saw [Woody Allen's Take the Money and Run](#) (1969) when he was 9 years old and was so enthralled by it, he still remembers how "It came on and it was like a religious experience".

Personal Tick - Always wears a suit and tie when he directs.

### Quotes:

*Every director should take an acting class.*

*The director is the only person on the set who has seen the film. Your job as a director is to show up every day and know where everything will fit into the film.*

*I think TV is better than movies these days. It has finally embraced serializations, so basically what you are getting is a never-ending movie on television. I am obsessed with trying to figure out what's a great serialized comedy, and how to do it.*

### Feeg Fun – Homework?

Feig was involved with the short 'Freckle and the Shih Tzu' (2019). It's on YouTube – 8mins.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4Gkxe0B3MA&t=310s>

Jessica Scharzer – Scriptwriter (11 credits)

Writer, producer, and director best known for her work on *Speak* (2004), *Nerve* (2016), *American Horror Story* (2011-2015), and the new mystery thriller *A Simple Favor* (2018). Scharzer has been nominated for 3 Primetime Emmy's for her work on *American Horror Story*. Scharzer is working on *The Young Elites* based on Marie Lu's novel. Currently producing *Nine Perfect Strangers* (TV series) - Due to the COVID19 restrictions, the production was moved from the US to Australia. Due to this, 1400 members of the cast and crew was able to keep their job for six months.

John Schwartzman – Cinematographer (46 credits)

Known for big budget films such as *Armageddon* (1998) *Sea Biscuit* (2003) and *Pearl Harbour* (2001). Francis Ford Capolla is his uncle – stepson of Talia Shire (ne Capolla). Capolla and George Lucas wrote his letters of recommendation to film schools after he beat them at the game *Risk*.

Thomas Shapiro – Music (86 credits)

Prolific composer since 1993, Mostly cinema. Often comedies – such as *You, Me and Dupress* (2006).

Brent White – Editor (37 credits)

TV and film work. Worked on *Spy* (2015) for Feig.

**Trivia**

To accentuate the contrast between the scary and the funny, director Paul Feig made the decision to shoot the movie like a brightly-lit comedy. "Thrilling things happen in the daylight rather than in darkly lit rooms." He adds, "in the suburbs, there's not a lot of hiding among the white walls and bright windows."

Anna Kendrick thinks that many women will be able to relate to Stephanie (Kendrick) and Emily's (Blake Lively) friendship because "Stephanie also wants validation from Emily." Kendrick says, "She's willing to put up with a lot of abuse because it's preferable to her loneliness."

Jessica Scharzer, the movie's screenwriter, found the character of Emily enjoyable to write because she's "so fashionable and slick, but it's also a facade. Intriguingly, both Emily and Stephanie have dark pasts, but they hide them in very different ways..."

Schwartzman went to film school with Paul Feig, but this is the first time they have worked on a film together.

Anna Kendrick has 39 costume changes in the movie. Her style begins as very bright and happy, but it evolves as she uncovers the secrets around her.

Surname media connections – Nelson (Ricky Nelson), Smothers Brothers – comedy duo from 1960s and 1970s. Probably others too.

## REVIEWS

### Sheila O'Malley – Roger Ebert.com, 2018

"A Simple Favor" is a pretty delicate balancing act. It's a thriller told with a broad sense of humor (even slapstick at times). One false move could have been deadly, resulting in a film self-serious, or straining to be "relevant," or—worse—just plain old boring. But "A Simple Favor," directed by [Paul Feig](#), has its cake and eats it too. It's suspenseful, but also hilarious. It's insightful about the head games women can play with each other, but it doesn't burden itself with trying to be "meaningful." It's not trying to "say something" about "how we live now" or anything like that. What a relief to watch a film unafraid of letting its hair down.

The funky stylized credits sequence (designed by [David Clayton](#)) clues us in immediately that this isn't going to be a gloomy by-the-book thriller. A throwback to 1960s comedies or spy capers, the credits involve single-color images of stilettos and purses moving around in angular cut-out shapes, a collage of conspicuous consumption, with one of the many classic French pop songs blaring behind it. The soundtrack is filled with [Serge Gainsbourg](#) songs, including "Bonnie & Clyde," his duet with [Brigitte Bardot](#), plus "Une Histoire de Plage," "Laisse Tomber les Filles," and Jean Paul Keller's "Ca C'est Arrange." Mood-setting is one of the most important aspects of film-making, and so many films fail to establish the proper mood from the jump. "A Simple Favor," written by [Jessica Sharzer](#), an adaptation of Darcey Bell's novel, knows exactly what it needs to do to establish the mood for all that will follow.

[Anna Kendrick](#) plays Stephanie Smothers, a single mom who runs a popular "vlog," where she shares recipes, parenting tips, and DIY how-tos. She's a type-A personality all the way, over-volunteering at her son's school, making other parents feel like slackers. In a couple of swift scenes it's established that Stephanie is virtually friendless ... until Emily Nelson ([Blake Lively](#))—whose son goes to school with Stephanie's son—strolls into her life. Emily has a high-powered job "in the city" (New York), and ropes Stephanie in to drinking martinis after picking up the boys from school. The two sit in her palatial glass-walled home, and get drunk. Stephanie is dazzled. It's not hard to see why. Emily is casually gorgeous, wearing high heels and pinstriped suits complete with gold watch chains. ([Renee Ehrlich Kalfus](#) deserves a lot of credit for her costume design.) Emily swears like a sailor (even in front of the kids), and has a direct way of speaking: she looks right at Stephanie, intimate, encouraging. Stephanie can't believe she has been "chosen" to be this fabulous creature's friend.

There are some red flags in Emily's behavior, which Stephanie ignores. Stephanie takes Emily's picture once, without Emily's consent, and Emily, in a tone that could cut glass, tells her to delete the photo. Emily's beauty is a smokescreen for an intimidating and mercurial personality, warm and encouraging one moment, slightly scary the next. Stephanie constantly apologizes for things, and Emily tells her to stop: "It's a fucked-up female habit." She's right. But Emily always keeps Stephanie just slightly off-balance. Both actresses are in high gear here. Kendrick is so awkward you yearn for Stephanie to just *relax*, but her awkwardness is why the performance is so funny. And Blake Lively is the reincarnation of [Julie Christie](#) in her best work in the 1960s and '70s: ruthless and charming, sexy and detached, a completely destabilizing presence to men and women alike. This is a great role for Lively.

And then, Emily goes missing. The police are called, and Stephanie finds herself the center of attention as Emily's "best friend." She helps Emily's husband Sean ([Henry Golding](#)) out with the kids, supports him in his grief and anxiety, and gives updates on her "vlog" (her follower count goes through the roof). But slowly, Stephanie starts to wonder if there might be more going on than meets the eye. What does Stephanie *really* know about Emily? Who *is* Emily? Even Nicky refers to his wife as a "beautiful ghost." Stephanie, underestimated and mocked, intimidated by Emily's cool gaze, finds a strength she didn't know she had, and "A Simple Favor" shifts, fluidly, into Stephanie: Girl Detective. She tries to piece together Emily's past, looking for clues. The whole situation is so gratifying because Stephanie is the same mousy overachiever, dressed in cute little combos from The Gap, only now she's sneaking through apartments and offices, breaking into filing cabinets, doing things she never thought she would—or could—do.

One of Paul Feig's gifts as a director is working with strong charismatic women, giving them space to whoop it up, work off one another, be co-creators. There's *space* in his approach, space left for behavior, humor, spontaneity. (Think of [Melissa McCarthy](#) and [Sandra Bullock](#) in "[The Heat](#)." That pairing could easily have become a franchise, *should* have become a franchise.) "A Simple Favor" has an intricate plot, with many surprise reveals as well as some truly spooky sequences, but it doesn't feel over-planned. Stephanie, at one point, goes into a panic, and shouts at Nicky, "Are you trying to 'Diabolique' me? Oh my God, you're trying to 'Diabolique' me!" It's a funny line, requiring you to know "Diabolique"—a remake of 1955's "Les Diaboliques," directed by [Henri-Georges Clouzot](#)—about a wife and mistress conspiring to kill the man they share in common. Those French pop songs don't dominate "A Simple Favor"'s soundtrack for nothing. The plot shares some similarities with "[Gone Girl](#)," but that's where the comparison should end. "Gone Girl" took itself very seriously. "A Simple Favor" doesn't take itself seriously at all. And that's a good thing.

**By Ben Travis** | - Empire Magazine  
2018

Here's a thriller pitch: did the internet kill [Paul Feig](#)? After a hit three-film run of [Bridesmaids](#), [The Heat](#) and [Spy](#), he was on a roll — and then came the trolls. Feig deigned to reboot [Ghostbusters](#) with — get this — a cast of four female leads. It prompted keyboard warriors to try and bury the filmmaker and his cast under a torrent of toxic ectoplasm from the deepest, darkest corners of Twitter. But here's the twist: Paul Feig didn't really die. Instead, he returned as something else.

For his post-'*busters* comeback, the sharp-suited director leaves behind his usual comedy set-pieces and frequent collaborator [Melissa McCarthy](#) for his first foray into the mystery-thriller genre. The hook of *A Simple Favour*, based on Darcey Bell's novel, lies in a one-line central conundrum: what happened to Emily ([Lively](#))? It's a question which haunts goody two-shoes mummy-blogger Stephanie ([Kendrick](#)), who'd recently befriended her when their kids became playmates. The pair are polar opposites — Stephanie spends her days spouting cupcake recipes on YouTube, while Emily caps off the school run with a strong martini. Then Emily disappears, after asking Stephanie for the titular 'simple favour' of picking up her son from school.

The characters are thinly drawn in a flimsy plot that just doesn't ring true.

From the Saul Bass-inspired posters to the namedropping of 1955 French psycho-thriller *Les Diaboliques*, Feig's reference points are clear. But while the set-up promises a dark, twisty thriller, *A Simple Favour* is far frothier and lighter — a drunken gossip over eye-wateringly tart cocktails rather than a searing gargle of bleach and painkillers. The leading ladies entertain — Kendrick is always watchable and Lively vamps it up deliciously in an incredible power-dressing wardrobe — but the characters are thinly drawn in a flimsy plot that twists and turns but just doesn't ring true. The unravelling mystery of Emily's whereabouts is poorly paced, with limp revelations and rushed developments, while the glossy world that Feig conjures feels hollow and artificial. The emergence of Stephanie's darker side in Emily's absence feels distinctly surface-level.

Despite its billing as a rug-pulling thriller, the darkness doesn't stick. Instead it's the comedy instincts of the old Feig that shine through, from the liberally peppered laughs ([Andrew Rannells](#) is a hoot as a bitchy dad living for the Emily/Stephanie drama), to the squeaky-clean visuals, and a final reel that deals in dark humour rather than sweaty-palmed tension. The tonal imbalance never settles and the film, while entertaining in patches, is all too forgettable. *A Simple Favour* doesn't end up being Feig's grand reinvention, after all. What a disappointing denouement.

Conclusion - Watching Blake Lively and Anna Kendrick trade barbs is entertaining, but Feig's first thriller suffers from an unconvincing plot and inconsistent tone.

END