

## Questions to help you understand *A Simple Favor*

### Chapter 1, pages 3-8

1. Make sure you understand the main characters in this section: Stephanie, Emily, Miles, Nicky, Sean, Davis, Chris.
2. How are Stephanie and Emily different (in your opinion)? What do they have in common?
3. Why do you think Stephanie and Emily are friends? ARE they friends?

### Chapter 2, pages 9-11

1. Where does this story take place?
2. What does Stephanie admire about Emily?

### Chapter 3, pages 12-15

1. Do you agree with Stephanie's panic about Emily? How long has Emily been gone at this point?
2. Who is Alison?

### Chapter 4, pages 16-19

1. How did Stephanie's husband and brother die?
2. What do you make (conclude) about Emily's assistant, Valerie, saying that "Emily had stepped out of the office for a moment?" (page 19) Is she lying? Is Emily really at the office?

### Chapter 5, pages 20-21

1. What's this chapter about? What do you think really happened at school?

### Chapter 6, pages 22-26

1. Should Stephanie have stopped by Emily's? Is this an invasion of privacy or something any friend would do in the same circumstances?
2. How long does Maricela (the house cleaner) think Emily will be gone for? Does this information calm Stephanie? Should it?
3. What is the significance of the twin photo? Why does the author include this?
4. Should Stephanie be calling the police? Would you?

### Chapter 7, pages 27-30

1. Did Sean's response to Stephanie's call surprise you?
2. Why was his attitude so different when he got back to the States?

### Chapter 8, pages 31-49

1. Who is at the front door? Why does Stephanie's mom say "Look Stephanie! It's your father!"

2. Who is Chris? How are he and Stephanie related?
3. How do the police react to the news of Emily's disappearance?
4. What happened when Sean called Emily's mother?
5. What do you learn about Emily's, Sean's, and Stephanie's childhoods?
6. Pay attention to clues about Emily and Sean's marriage (for example, at the top of page 41)

#### Chapter 9, pages 50-54

1. Why is it significant that Emily has a life insurance policy for \$2 million, payable to Sean?
2. Does the knowledge of the life insurance policy change Stephanie's view of Sean?
3. Would you leave your child with Sean at this time?
4. How does Stephanie feel now about the police's theory that Emily just ran away?

#### Chapter 10, pages 55-61

1. Why didn't Stephanie have friends when she and Davis first moved to Connecticut?
2. What was going on in Stephanie's life when she met Emily (E)?
3. Why does Stephanie refer to Emily in this blog as "E" and not "Emily"?
4. What are Stephanie's first impressions of Emily's house and life?

#### Chapter 11, pages 62-73

1. What does Stephanie remember about the umbrella Emily gave her?
2. How would you describe Stephanie's marriage to Davis?
3. Why does Stephanie invite Sean to stay the night at her house?
4. Why do you think Stephanie doesn't mention her blog to Sean?
5. Why does Sean tell Stephanie about Emily's grandfather's sexual abuse of her? What purpose does this serve, if any?
6. Why does Stephanie start eating meat again?
7. Stephanie thinks she is being sensible and cautious about Sean? Do you agree? Is she putting her son Miles in danger?
8. Why does Stephanie trust Sean?

#### Chapter 12, pages 74-75

4. Why does Stephanie correct herself when she writes "... given what they're going through. What *we're* going through." (end of first paragraph)
5. What is Stephanie trying to tell her readers in this blog post?
6. What is the "holding pattern" Stephanie is referring to? What is she waiting for?

#### Chapter 13, pages 76-78

7. What is the "hasty conclusion" Stephanie jumped to when Sean called her to come over *now*?
8. What do you think happened to Emily? Is the body Emily's?

#### Chapter 14, pages 79-82

9. Why doesn't Sean want to get rid of Emily's things?
10. Is it significant that Sean says, "When she comes back —"?

#### Chapter 15, pages 83-89

11. Why do Sean and Stephanie conclude that Emily's death was an accident? Do you agree?
12. What is the financial difference between Emily dying by accident and Emily dying by suicide?
13. What does the autopsy report show (page 85)? Is there anything significant in it?
14. How does Stephanie see her and Sean's roles during and after Nicky's meltdown?
15. Does Stephanie struggle with her relationship with Sean? How? Do you agree with her struggles? Is she making the right choices?

#### Chapter 16, page 90

16. Why include this never-posted blog post in the book? What is its purpose?

#### Chapter 17, pages 91-95

17. Compare these two statements by Stephanie: (page 85) "I realized what I had settled for . . . a life in which I put Miles' needs above my own. Now that I remembered, I refused to live without that pleasure and joy again." And, (page 92) "Having Miles means everything. I've learned to put myself aside and live for my son." Are they contradictory? Or does Stephanie simply have lots of different thoughts and feelings at this time?
18. How do Chris and Davis die?
19. Why does Stephanie mention the tears on her keyboard at the end of the post?

#### Chapter 18, pages 96-99

20. Compare Stephanie's tone in this chapter and in Chapter 17 (her blog post). It's the same story – what is different?
21. Why did Stephanie change the story for her blog?
22. Do you think the accident was an accident or a suicide? Was Stephanie to blame?

#### Chapter 19, pages 100-108

23. How are Chris and Davis different?
24. What happened when they first met (Chris and Davis)?
25. What happens when Davis asks Stephanie if there is something (romantic) between her and Chris?
26. Why did Stephanie bury Davis in a regular coffin instead of giving him a green, earth-friendly burial like he wanted?
27. Why does Stephanie commit totally to raising Miles and never being with a man again?

#### Chapter 20, pages 109-111

1. What do you think of the living arrangements Stephanie and Sean and the boys have?

2. Do you sense any stress in Stephanie? If so, what is stressing her out?

#### Chapter 21, pages 112-119

3. What discrepancies (differences) do you notice between this account of Stephanie's life and her blog post in Chapter 20?
4. Nicky says he saw his mom at school. Does Stephanie believe him? Does Sean? Do you?
5. Why does Sean insist that Nicky sprayed himself with Emily's perfume?

#### Chapter 22, page 120

6. Why does Stephanie want to know the name of this movie?

#### Chapter 23, pages 121-123

7. What is the general plot of the film, *Diabolique*, as Stephanie describes it?

#### Chapter 24, pages 124-135

1. Why is Sean so sure Emily is dead? Is he purposely ignoring evidence? Or is Stephanie over-reacting to the boys' supposed sighting of Emily at school?
2. Does Stephanie seem confident of her and Sean's relationship? Why or why not?
3. Why does Stephanie stop blogging?
4. Why is Stephanie obsessed with learning about Emily? (In your opinion)
5. Why does Stephanie keep one of Emily's birthday cards?
6. Why does Stephanie stop searching for clues about Emily? What is the significance of the ring? (In your opinion)
7. Do you think Emily really called Stephanie? Or did Stephanie dream of the phone call? Should Stephanie tell Sean?

#### Chapter 25, pages 139-173

28. What has Emily been doing since she has been missing?
29. Does Emily like Stephanie? Does she respect her? Are they friends?
30. Top of page 142: What two tests has Sean failed? For what reason did Emily choose Stephanie?
31. Why does the guy with the wife-beater t-shirt (the man with the binoculars) scare Emily so much that she has to move? Does this surprise you?
32. What do you think of the movie Peeping Tom? Do you agree with Emily and Dennis Nylon, or with Sean?
33. Why does Emily steal Sean's mother's ring? (in your opinion)
34. How would you react if you were Sean when Emily tells him on the plane that she took his mother's ring?
35. Emily told Sean not to believe reports that she was dead (page 149). Does this mean they planned her disappearance together? How much does Sean know?
36. Why did Sean eventually agree to Emily's insurance fraud plan?
37. Why did Emily need Stephanie for her plan to work?

38. Do you find Emily's dedication to her son, Nicky, consistent with the rest of her personality?
39. Emily says "The joke is on me" several times. What does she mean?
40. What is Stephanie's last big secret? Does this secret change your view of Stephanie? Of Davis' car accident?
41. Why does Emily play her recording of Stephanie's secret to Sean?
42. Do you believe Sean really thinks Emily is dead?
43. Is Emily's plan going as she envisioned? (as she planned it?)

#### Chapters 26-27, pages 174-177

44. What is Stephanie trying to accomplish with her letter to Emily?
45. Is this a good idea? Will it succeed? (For a hint, read the first sentence in the next chapter, pages 178 ;)

#### Chapter 28, pages 178-179

46. How would you describe Emily's reaction to Stephanie's blog post to her?

#### Chapter 29, pages 180-184

47. Is Sean pretending he doesn't know about Miles' true father?
48. Why is Emily angry at Stephanie but not Sean? (as Stephanie asks on page 182)
49. What does Stephanie smell when she gets home?

#### Chapter 30, pages 185-186

50. Why does Stephanie write this blog post?

#### Chapter 31, pages 187-200

51. Why is Stephanie becoming less trustful of Sean?
52. Why does Emily's birthday card surprise Stephanie?
53. Does anything surprise you about Emily's mom? Is she as senile (unable to think clearly) as Emily described her as being?
54. What shocking thing does Stephanie discover about Emily?
55. What theory does this discovery lead Stephanie to make about Emily's "death?"
56. Why does Bernice say "You watch yourself" (page 198) to Stephanie?
57. Do you think Sean knows that Emily has a twin sister?
58. Stephanie thinks Emily has made a mistake. What do you think it is?

#### Chapter 32, pages 201-202

1. What's the real message of this blog post?

#### Chapter 33, pages 203-225

1. Is Emily responsible for Evelyn's problems with drugs and alcohol (in your opinion)?
2. Is Emily just a thrill-seeker or a sociopath?

3. At the bottom of page 208, Emily says, "By morning I knew what I was going to do and what was going to happen. I knew, and I didn't know." What do you think she means?
4. What is Emily's intention when she leaves for the cabin at the lake in Michigan?
5. Is Evelyn's argument on page 16 about Emily helping her die convincing to you? (Paragraph 3)
6. Is Emily relieved when Evelyn wakes up and decides not to kill herself after all?
7. Is Evelyn serious about wanting to live after all? Or is she playing games with Emily?
8. Does Emily bear some responsibility for Evelyn's death? How much?
9. Why doesn't Emily want Stephanie to tell Sean that she has/had a twin sister?
10. If Sean believes Emily is dead, why does he agree to meet her?
11. Why is Emily so angry at Sean?
12. What has happened to their insurance fraud plan?

#### Chapter 34, pages 229-244

1. This is the first time we've heard from Sean. Does the first sentence surprise you?
2. Are you surprised that Sean doesn't love Stephanie?
3. What was Sean's expectation when Emily wanted to get together with him at the restaurant?
4. Why does the insurance man think Emily is still alive? Why does Sean disagree?

#### Chapter 35, pages 245-246

5. Why does Stephanie write this blog post? What message is she trying to get to Emily?
6. Is she telling Emily that she'll "do what she needs, no matter what" or is she suggesting that Emily wasn't a true friend when she asked her for a "simple favor?"

#### Chapter 36, pages 247-263

7. At the bottom of page 247, Stephanie questions whether Emily or Sean has ever told her the truth. At the top of the next page, she admits that it should make her angry, but doesn't. Why do you think this is? Is it normal NOT to be angry when lied to?
8. Why does Emily want her engagement ring (the sapphire) back?
9. Are there holes in Emily's story? In other words, are there things that don't make sense? Things that Stephanie should have stopped and reconsidered?
10. What part of Emily's story is illogical in the first paragraph at the very top of page 257?
11. Why is Stephanie so willing to believe everything Emily tells her?
12. Does it make sense now that Emily wanted to wait 30 minutes to "talk" to Mr. P?
13. How did Emily kill Mr. Prager?
14. Why did Emily want Stephanie to bring Sean's hairbrush?
15. Can you relate to Stephanie's feeling of being "liberated" (freed) as she helped Emily dispose of Mr. P's body? (page 262)
16. Have you seen the movie *Thelma and Louise*? If you have, do you think Stephanie and Emily are like Thelma and Louise?

17. With everything that's happened, should Stephanie trust Emily? Why or why not? What do you think will happen now?

Chapter 37, pages 264-266

1. Is Stephanie's blog appropriate? Is it responsible?

Chapter 38, pages 267-270

59. How is Emily confused? What "facts" has she twisted?  
60. Why does Emily need a lawyer (from Dennis Nylon)?

Chapter 39, pages 271-272

61. How has Stephanie's involvement in Emily's killing of Mr. Prager changed her?  
62. Why does she go along with Emily's order to pretend this (killing) never happened?

Chapter 40, pages 273-280

63. Why is Sean angry at Stephanie?  
64. How is Emily able to accuse Sean of killing her sister whom he never met? Why is this believable to Stephanie?  
65. Why does Stephanie say "You slapped her in front of me" (page 275) about Sean's "abuse" of Emily? Is this true?  
66. On page 276, who says "You crazy bitch" first? Why does Stephanie accuse Sean of calling her and Emily "crazy bitches?"  
67. Emily suggests (on page 276) that it is not scientifically possible to accurately pinpoint the time of Evelyn's death. Because Sean has been to the cabin and left his fingerprints there, and because Evelyn was also there, it is impossible to determine whether they were there at the same time or not. Do you know if this is true?  
68. At the bottom of page 277, Sean describes Emily as a woman with "no thoughts, only feelings." Do you agree?  
69. What does Sean's coworker, Carrington, show Sean?

Chapter 41, pages 281-283

1. Is *this* blog appropriate? Responsible?  
2. How does this blog differ from the one on page 264?  
3. Why does Stephanie write this blog post? Does she have new information?

Chapter 42, pages 284-286

1. How does Carrington save Sean?  
2. Why does Carrington save Sean?  
3. Do you admire or dislike Carrington? Why?

Chapter 43, pages 287-291

1. Was anyone watching Emily from the woods?
2. Do you think Emily can live a normal life like she wants to?
3. Why is it still important for Emily to make Sean suffer?

Chapter 44, pages 292-293

1. Is Stephanie realistic about her and Emily's friendship? How does her description of their friendship differ from Emily's? Whose is more accurate?
2. Is Stephanie lying to herself? How? In what ways?