

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT CLARA

Screenplay by

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OVER BLACK:

NARRATOR (V.O.)
There's something about Clara.

FADE IN:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

A faded brick building. Its once deep color has been bleached almost white from the sun and neglect.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The large corkboard on the block wall, topped with multi-colored lit holly, says M-E-R-R-Y C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S. Sprinkled throughout are child-created images - snowmen, festive socks, and, of course, Santa Claus.

In the corner near the window, a modest tree bears handmade ornaments with each child's name.

Snowflakes dangle from the rain-stained tile ceiling.

A large wreath adorns the door.

PLAQUES on the wall honor MS. HOLLANDER's class throughout the years with best chorus performance.

The CHILDREN sit in rows three-by-five.

AVA (10), sandy-haired, curious, is front and center.

AVA (NARRATOR)(V.O.)
That's me.

Ms. Hollander points and gasps, mostly for effect.

AVA (V.O.)
It's snowing for the first time
this year!

The children rush the windows. Ava attempts to muscle through the big kids for the perfect vantage point.

AVA (V.O.)
Someone's not interested, as usual.

Ava glances to the back row at CLARA (10).

Clara's brown hair is kempt but not styled, her clothes neat but plain. Her shoulders hunch forward, and her head drops toward the desk.

Ms. Hollander collects Clara and guides her to a window.

AVA (V.O.)
There's something about Clara.

All the children find so much joy in the snow, but Clara's eyes lack that spark of holiday glimmer.

AVA (V.O.)
I really can't figure it out.

THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Ms. Hollander waves her hands several times in an attempt to get the unruly children to quiet down.

AVA (V.O.)
At first, I thought it was because
she was the new girl.

Ms. Hollander reads from a piece of paper.

AVA (V.O.)
That must be it.

Ms. Hollander gestures toward Clara and encourages the class to applaud.

AVA (V.O.)
Ms. Hollander chose Clara as one of
the lead chorus singers.

Ava looks back in time to see Clara startled awake.

AVA (V.O.)
Why isn't she excited about it?

INT. GYMNASIUM - STAGE - DAY

The children are on stage for chorus practice, in full voice.

AVA (V.O.)
Our favorite song for performance
night is "Over the Rainbow".

WE HEAR a somewhat melodic elementary school version of OVER THE RAINBOW. Clara lags behind the rest with her words.

AVA (V.O.)
I mean, Clara is a great singer and
all, but how are we going to win if
she can't keep up?

Ava gets to her tippy-toes and finishes on time... while
Clara sings the long end-note "I" after the music ends.

AVA (V.O.)
Why doesn't she pay attention?

The class laughs. Clara bows her head, embarrassed.

AVA (V.O.)
There's something about Clara. I
really want to know.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

The children sit at a long table - they are TOO LOUD as they
trade meals, throw tin foil balls, and compete for attention.

Clara is on one end, an empty seat between her and the
nearest kid. She reads while gnawing on a sandwich.

THE CLASS CLOWN (male, 11) improvises a french fry mustache,
eyebrows, and a cigar, to the HOWLS of his court.

Clara remains fixated on her book.

AVA (V.O.)
I mean, it's all really stupid...
but why can't she join in?

Ava dips and turns her head, sending a bright smile in
Clara's direction. She thumbs toward the hilarity.

Their eyes meet for a brief moment... then Clara turns away.

Clara breathes deeply. A tight-lipped smile grows.

AVA (V.O.)
And this is where it begins.

Ava nods toward her classmates' silliness, and laughs.

Clara smiles, and slides into the empty chair.

The male student sees Clara, gets up, and leans over.

AVA (V.O.)
And that's when stupid french fry
guy had to say 'what's up with
plain Jane, she finally woke up?'.

Clara runs. The group erupts in mean-spirited laughter.

Ava leaps from her seat. She pushes past fry guy in disgust
and chases after Clara.

INT. GIRL'S RESTROOM - DAY

Clara is hunched over a sink, softly crying.

Ava approaches slowly, searching for something to say.

AVA
Most of them are dorks, you know.

Clara tears some paper from the dispenser, wipes her eyes,
and blows her nose.

AVA (CONT'D)
I'm Ava.

Clara sniffs, and chuckles.

CLARA
Yeah, I know. I'm Clara.

Now it's Ava's turn to chuckle.

AVA
Yeah, I know. You have a great
singing voice.

Clara smiles.

CLARA
Thanks. I liked your history
report. I learned a lot.

AVA
I liked yours, too. And I liked
Lauren's report on Genghis Khan.

CLARA
You know something? I read that one
out of two hundred men living today
may be related to him.

AVA

Wow. Maybe that's why my dad is so cranky in the morning.

Clara giggles. Ava joins her.

AVA (CONT'D)

How do you know that?

Clara shuffles her feet, slightly embarrassed.

CLARA

I don't know, I try to read whatever I can get my hands on.

Clara turns serious again.

CLARA (CONT'D)

How did you get to be so popular?

Ava's surprised.

AVA

Am I popular?

CLARA

Everyone likes you.

AVA

I don't know. I don't try to do anything special. I'm just me.

Clara lets out a heavy sigh.

CLARA

I know everyone makes fun of me.

AVA

Like I said, they're dorks.

CLARA

I hear them all. Saying I wear old-fashioned stuff. That I'm always out of it.

Clara looks at Ava, tears welling.

CLARA (CONT'D)

If I tell you something, do you promise not to tell anyone?

Ava crosses her heart.

CLARA (CONT'D)

The reason I started school late
is... my mom and I had to leave our
home. And we went to a shelter.

Ava looks wide-eyed at Clara.

AVA (V.O.)

I mean, I'm only ten. This is a
pretty heavy thing. But I kept
thinking, this is one brave girl.

CLARA

I just wanted to shower in my own
bathroom, and sleep in my own bed!
It was so crowded and noisy... it
was hard to finish my homework. I
curled up next to mom to keep from
being scared all night... and I
worried that someone would touch my
stuff while I was in school.

AVA (V.O.)

Like I said, pretty heavy.

CLARA

We were lucky. We got out of the
shelter and got our own room. I
guess I'm grateful, there are nice
people who are helping us. I mean,
the food is okay. But sometimes I
just want my mom's lasagna.

AVA

I would never know if you didn't
tell me.

CLARA

It's okay if you don't want to be
my friend.

Ava smiles warmly.

AVA

Too late.

Ava moves to hug Clara, who steps back.

AVA (V.O.)

There's something about Clara.
She's not ready for hugs yet. But I
totally get it.

Ava motions to the door.

AVA (V.O., PRELAP)
Now Clara and I are inseparable.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Ava and Clara sit on the backyard steps, giggling while dunking chocolate chip cookies in milk.

The girls share popcorn at the movies.

The two lie on Ava's bed and watch a video.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. AVA'S HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - DAY

Ava and Clara, dressed for the cold, stand next to a cocoa stand, bearing a sign: GET A CAROL WITH EVERY CUP!

AVA (V.O.)
Welcome to the best hot cocoa stand
in town. And we love to sing.

A gloved hand drops \$2.00 for a steaming cup. In return, the girls belt out WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

AVA (V.O.)
We made enough to buy Clara an
outfit for the class party!

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Clara proudly models the festive red dress for Ava.

AVA (V.O.)
There's something about Clara.
She's warm, kind, and funny!

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The girls sit at the table while AVA'S MOM cooks.

AVA (V.O.)
We asked Clara if she and her mom
would spend Christmas with us.

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CHRISTMAS EVE

The girls, dressed in pajamas, take gingerbread cookies out of the oven. They're ready for decorating!

LIVING ROOM

The girls hang the last strands of silver tinsel on the tree.
They gingerly place the handmade ornaments.

AVA'S ROOM

The girls are fast asleep in Ava's bed. Clara tightly snuggles her pillow, dreaming of the morning.

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS MORNING

Clara's up before the others. She sits cross-legged, staring in wonder at the tree. SILENT NIGHT plays on an antique music box. It's more beautiful than she could ever have imagined.

Ava tiptoes down the stairs, a wrapped box behind her back.

She taps Clara on the shoulder, and extends the gift. Clara takes it... and holds it to her chest... as a tear escapes.

AVA (V.O.)
Merry Christmas, Clara.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

AVA (V.O.)
There's something about Clara.

FADE IN:**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

Clara sits next to Ava. She's bright and alert.

AVA (V.O.)
She's outgoing, friendly, and even
sits in the front row.

Ms. Hollander points to a problem on the board. Clara's hand shoots up a second before Ava's does.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Clara, Ava, and TWO CLASSMATES explode through the door and bound down the main stairs, joking and laughing.

AVA (V.O., PRELAP)
Clara's mom got a job.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

CLARA'S MOM and Ava's mom clink glasses, while the girls playfully "toast" with the cherries from their sundaes.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Ms. Hollander lets Clara - resplendent in her red dress, with a pretty white bow across the waist - hang the NEW PLAQUE on the wall, for yet another chorus victory.

AVA (V.O.)
With Clara as the lead, we were
stronger than we've ever been.

Clara steps back, admiring her work.

Ms. Hollander claps her hands and stamps her feet in celebration. Clara, front and center, leads a rousing version of JOY TO THE WORLD, swaying sassily to the beat.

AVA (V.O., PRELAP)
And then - graduation day is here.

INT. GYMNASIUM - STAGE - DAY

Clara, in her cap and gown, approaches Ms. Hollander.

AVA (V.O.)
I guess if the class knew how much
she had to overcome, they would
have given her a standing ovation.

Clara raises her diploma proudly to some HOOTS and a "YEAH, CLARA!" from the crowd.

Clara walks off the stage and runs into Ava's arms.

Clara's mom bends to whisper to her daughter.

AVA (V.O.)
When her mom told her they were
finally moving into their own
apartment...

Clara puts her hand to her mouth... she jumps up and down.
And squeezes her mom for all she's worth.

AVA (V.O.)
I'm glad I was there to see it.

Clara and Ava grip each other's hand tightly.

AVA (V.O.)
There's something about Clara.
She's my best friend forever.