

A Simple Life

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [June 13, 2012](#) issue

Whenever people complain to me about the lack of “realistic” movies out there, I point them to tiny gems such as Ann Hui’s *A Simple Life*, Hong Kong’s entry for last year’s Oscar for best foreign language film. It concerns a 72-year-old woman named Ah Tao (Deanie Ip), who has been a servant to a middle-class Chinese family for 60 years, watching the generations pass, the children grow up and mature, the elders grow old and die.

As the story begins, Ah Tao is still the servant for Roger (Andy Lau), the youngest boy in the family and its only member left in Hong Kong. She cooks for him, cleans his small apartment and watches over him like a second mother. One day, she has a stroke and is forced to move into a local nursing home. As her health deteriorates, it is now Roger’s turn to care for the woman who has always watched out for him.

This plot summary doesn’t begin to do justice to this wise little film. The nursing home is rich with wonderful characters and daily intrigues, which Ah Tao is only too willing to get involved with if she can assist in some way (once a caretaker . . .). We also get a glimpse into Andy’s life, including loyal friends he has had since childhood who still remember the way Ah Tao would make them snacks when they came over to play. In one of the film’s most moving scenes, the boys, now men in their thirties, make a group call to Ah Tao at the nursing home. As they speak, she can remember each and every one of them, down to the smallest, most embarrassing detail.

A Simple Life is playing in only a few U.S. cities. If you can’t locate it where you live, look for it on DVD. It is uplifting in all the right ways.