

Abilities Inc.

Series Bible

Written by:
Dawn Johnston

dawn@dawnjohnston.ca

Management: John Ferraro
Valleywood Entertainment, Los Angeles
(323) 428-3042
john@valleywoodent.com

Abilities Inc.

What would you do if you suddenly discovered you had superhuman powers? Join a ready-made group of crime fighters? Battle a super-villain? Save a baby? That only happens in the movies. There really is no wronged-by-the-world, evil-doer threatening to take over the world. You'd be on your own, trying to figure it out. Who would you tell? How would they react? What might they want from you? And what if you don't even want these damned abilities?

This one-hour, comedy-drama follows two young women struggling with just those questions.

Series Logline

When two young women with disabilities suddenly develop unique super-human gifts they keep this crazy fact a secret while they figure out what happened and how to monetize it.

The Big Picture

GRACIE (19) has cerebral palsy and uses a forearm crutch for mobility. She just wants to blend, be like everybody else, get her degree, and get a job. But college throws her into the deep end. No more hand holding -- she's on her own.

Childhood friend SHAY (19) is her polar opposite. Ever since Shay lost most of her vision as a child she's been fighting for her place in the world. Life is unfair, she resents being ignored or forgotten, and she especially resents being pitied.

Gracie and Shay both contract a common virus which, for unknown reasons, has a profound effect on them physically: super-speed for Gracie, and infrared vision for Shay.

But super-powers don't always make for super-heroes. Gracie would rather ignore this new development and concentrate on her studies. Shay just sees the opportunity to monetize this shit.

Characters

GRACIE STEELE, 19, is smart and intensely private. She wants to be her own person, even if she has no idea how to do that. Her father and sister have always looked out for her but that's starting to grate. Gracie expects to be overlooked, and she is. But there's a leader inside her that she just has to find, and Shay can help with that.

Here's something SHAY BELL, 19, knows -- nobody stops a blind girl tap-tapping her way out of a grocery store no matter how much contraband she's stuffed down her shirt. This world is taking her eyesight, so this world can suck it. Shay's a good person underneath the swagger, she just needs to tear down a few walls and let people in. Shay would definitely sneer at that sentiment.

RIZ HOSSEINI (early 20s) is Shay's roommate. He's the child of Irani immigrants who is definitely not on track to be a doctor. He runs one of those ubiquitous vegetarian food blogs that's *this close* to taking off, and he's Shay's patient friend. Riz is the only one who knows about Shay and Gracie's abilities and he'll help them run their business.

CLAIRE STEELE, 30, is Gracie's much older sister, a newly minted vice squad officer. She loves helping people, not because she's that giving, but because most people have no idea what's good for them. And she does. Claire is ambitious, and feeling the pressure to achieve in her new role. Lately she's been secretly using ritalin to help keep up. Claire took on a nurturing role with Gracie after their mother died and has difficulty giving up that role.

HENRY STEELE, mid-50's, is Gracie's father. A government scientist, he's earnest and smart but he doesn't realize how much he's been holding Gracie back. He just wants the best for her but he's blind to his stranglehold of good intentions. No one knows it yet, but the experimental gene therapy he subjected Gracie to as a child may be the cause of her new abilities.

Pilot Summary

Reserved Gracie is thrilled to be starting college, until her literal worst nightmare happens: she gets dizzy and throws up all over herself and her professor in front of her whole first year biology class. Then, while cleaning up in the bathroom she accidentally thrusts the faucet right through the goddam sink. Something is very wrong. And when her professor comes in and slips on the mess, Gracie tries to save her and the bathroom is rocked by a strange explosion.

At the hospital she freaks with all the attention from news, doctors, her family. It's all too much and she just wants to go home.

At the same time, Shay's also struck by dizziness and a hallucinatory episode where she can see in ultraviolet and infrared. Shay excitedly tells her roommate Riz, who recognizes in her description something he saw in a viral video of her old classmate, Gracie.

They find Gracie working alone in the college lab, but she initially denies her abilities. It's only when Shay demonstrates hers, and in the process discovers she can also tell (kind of) when people are lying, that Gracie admits to having super-speed. And she thinks the explosion was a sonic boom.

Excited, Shay wants to team up, practise their skills and figure this out. But careful Gracie balks. She's already behind at school and, more importantly, she knows what happens to lab rats. And that's what they'd be if anyone found out. No, thank you. And honestly, they were never friends. Shay's pissed. "You always were the human equivalent of wallpaper," she says. To which Gracie replies, "I'd rather be wallpaper than dead."

With money tight, Shay offers her lie-detection services to her friend and weed dealer, Izzy, an old woman who deals to keep up with the bills in her fancy retirement home. Izzy suspects that George, her money guy, is skimming profits and she wants Shay to find out the truth. Shay may have overstated her skills in that area. He may or may not be lying but he definitely has a gun.

Gracie meets up with Riz to find missing Shay and they realize she's in trouble. Gracie turns on the super-speed and orchestrates a sonic boom that protects Shay and Izzy while immobilizing George. They all barely escape as the police arrive. Back at Shay's, Gracie's flush with newfound courage and Shay's excited that Gracie has agreed to work together. Their new project? Abilities Inc. their secret, on the down-low business: premium lie detection, spying, other specialty jobs.

What they don't know is that Gracie's sister Claire, who was first on scene at the retirement home, recognizes the blast radius. Claire's on the case.

Sample Episodes

Gracie, Shay and Riz set up their business and their first client is an infidelity case. And while they can easily find out the truth, actually producing evidence proves more difficult. Without proof the client doesn't pay and they know they need to be much smarter about this. Claire has a photo of Shay entering the retirement home, and interviews her about the explosion. Claire doesn't believe her wrong place/wrong time story, but she has to let her go.

With the new business floundering, Shay secretly starts to work with Izzy who's been trying to run the weed business on her own. When George identifies Izzy to the police as his partner, Shay pushes Gracie to steal evidence from the police station, where Gracie accidentally causes an explosion.

Riz pushes value proposition and branding for Abilities Inc, and Shay and Gracie clash over business decisions. Sister Claire discovers that Shay and Gracie are now friends, and demands Gracie stay away from her, causing a rift in their relationship. Gracie questions her professor about gene therapy research and suspects it may be part of their mystery.

Season arcs

When well-meaning people tell you how “special” you are your whole life you can believe your own hype, or become cynical and confused about where you really stand.

SHAY

We're special all right. And not in that patronizing "you're not really even up to the level of ordinary" way. Hell with that. Because we're *extra-ordinary*, bitches. And all those normies can suck it.

GRACIE

So it's extra or... insignificant? Those are my choices?

SHAY

Ya, well, welcome to life.

Over the course of the series, Gracie goes from a disempowered young woman whose main focus is blending in, to a strong leader who recognizes her own agency. And while her new abilities don't change her need for crutches or for help at times, she comes to understand that her body is perfect the way it is.

The chip on Shay's shoulder will shrink with Gracie's influence. Her anger at the world and how it has treated her is replaced by an empathy she never possessed. She comes to recognize that everyone is dealt different cards, some good, some bad, and that there's power, and even peace, in forgiveness. She does, however, remain a badass.

Season 1

Season one focuses on Gracie and Shay's changing lives as they attempt to hide the details of their inconceivable new skills while also starting a new business. Gracie struggles with the pressures of being a full-time college student even as Shay pushes her further out of her comfort zone. To make ends meet, Shay starts a side-business helping Izzy, her weed dealer, which she keeps from Gracie. And since it's Shay, who leaps before she looks, she gets in deeper than she'd planned. And Gracie, careful, by-the-book Gracie, gets pulled in to help.

Throughout the season they investigate the source of their abilities, and realize they actually met as young children when their parents took them to see a DR. EUGENE FASSBENDER for experimental gene therapy. They find out later that a common flu virus likely triggered the genes to mutate, causing their abilities. When they confront Gracie's dad about Dr. Fassbender he's evasive, except to say that the therapy didn't work and that Dr. Fassbender died years ago. As they investigate on their own, the

season ends with the realization that they weren't the only children in the trial, meaning there may be others with abilities out there. Oh, and Dr. Fassbender is alive.

Season 2

They track down Dr. Fassbender, the pioneer in gene therapy who conducted the original experiments and find out he went underground, he says, because big pharma was after his research. Through his records, they find two more people with enhanced abilities: a deaf man who now can now turn on super-hearing. And a young man who had been treated for a brain tumor. His cancer is gone, but he now has telepathic powers. They join the business, and Gracie and Shay must cope with shifting leadership and priorities.

Gracie can only hold her sister, Claire, off so long and eventually spills all, which complicates their relationship. Claire has always seen herself as Gracie's protector.

Over time, Gracie notices she's getting weaker and she finally trusts Dr. Fassbender enough to tell him. The season ends with a shock: their cells are degenerating. And though the regression is slow, it's unmistakable. Using their abilities is actually causing their disabilities to get worse.

Season 3 and beyond

The more people who find out about their abilities, the more their world expands and the more other people depend on them. The business becomes the group's livelihood, and Gracie's sister Claire starts relying on them for her police work. It proves very difficult for some to just stop using their abilities so, instead, they focus on finding a cure with Dr. Fassbender's help.

But Riz has always found Dr. Fassbender's story a bit fishy and finally convinces Shay and Gracie to investigate. What they find is the worst: he went underground because he was doing controversial and illegal research on germline gene therapy. Eugenics.

They suspect that the Dr. Fassbender wants to harness their abilities in pursuit of his unethical eugenics goals. The group is in turmoil. If they turn themselves in and hope for a cure they'll be exploited, and if they run, there's little hope of a cure.

Themes and Tone

ABILITIES is a comedy drama because people of all shapes, sizes and abilities are pretty damned strange. Whether you use a crutch, or a cane, you have hopes, dreams, foibles and embarrassing secrets like anyone else. Also, a crutch makes a decent weapon in a pinch.

The show will explore the nature of heroism. What would you do with extraordinary abilities? We may take it for granted that we'd become the morally unambiguous hero

with an unwavering focus on saving humanity. But most people aren't heroic. And a few enhanced abilities won't change that. At least very easily.

In real life there are no morally superior superheroes or wickedly evil super-villains. ABILITIES INC. is about people in extraordinary circumstances navigating their far-from-ordinary new lives.

