

A Dishwasher's Purpose

By

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A crippled soldier, his place lost in the world, struggles to find meaning to it all, when a friend from his past arrives at the last possible moment to confront his assumptions about life.

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FADE IN

INT. MAKESHIFT KITCHEN - DAY

Explosions rock the building every few seconds. Tile and concrete fall from the walls and the ceilings as the mortar shells strike closer and closer. ISAAC EDWARDS takes notice of the crumbling building, but returns to the task at hand undeterred.

More explosions. The electric lights flicker briefly.

Isaac's focus remains on his unseen job. Isaac reaches to his left and grabs

A WORN DINNER PLATE

He wipes furiously at the remains of food caked on its surface. His fingers struggle to retain a grip on the wet flat disk, his HANDS MORE CLAWS, incapable of most fine motor skills.

Once scrubbed clear, he rinses the plate, SQUEAKS it with his one good thumb and places it in the ever growing stack of dinnerware to his right.

He grasps for another plate, but comes back empty. He looks at the stack of dirty dishes. There are plenty, but Isaac has trouble getting a feel for their exact location.

While not completely blind, his vision has been SEVERELY IMPAIRED. There is a disfiguring SCAR across his brow caused by the same attack that destroyed his vision.

He buries his chin in his neck and clenches his fists. Isaac's voice is SCRATCHY AND LABORED.

ISAAC
(frustrated)
God dammit.

He draws a ragged deep breath and tries again. He comes back with a plate and continues to wipe.

The explosions have become almost routine now, and their sound seems to fade into the background. The building slowly falls apart around him while he washes, one, two more plates.

The scream of an incoming mortar grows louder. This is going to be a close one. Before it hits, the service entry door in the back of the kitchen bursts open, and MAGGIE PHELPS rushes through. She sees Isaac placidly washing dishes looking blankly out the window over his sink.

MAGGIE

Isaac, what the hell are you doing here?

The scream is right on top of them. Maggie looks to the window. Her eyes go wide as she spots something.

MAGGIE

Get down!

She dives forward, throws her body over Isaac, and as they crash into the ground every window in the building SHATTERS from the explosion.

Maggie remains on top of Isaac until the sound of falling glass subsides. She helps Isaac to his feet as she stands.

Maggie is a stunning woman. Her sharp facial features and naturally curvy body seem almost enhanced by the layer of grime that covers her head to toe. She keeps her hair short and wears no makeup, but her natural beauty shines through even the most dirt covered spots on her body.

Her makeshift military attire and myriad weapons that hang from her belt, hips, and shoulders exposes her status as a soldier. Though nothing is so formal in this society, so she bears no rank.

MAGGIE

Are you hurt?

ISAAC

No more than before. Hello, Margret, it's been a while.

Maggie ignores the self-pitying comment and the forced formality of his greeting.

MAGGIE

You shouldn't be here. Everyone is either at the Wall or in the shelters.

Isaac clumsily wipes debris and dust from his clothing, he doesn't even look at where he brushes. After a moment he LIMPS toward the kitchen's storage closet.

ISAAC
I'm washing the dishes, Maggie,
like I do everyday.

INT. KITCHEN STORAGE CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

Isaac roots around the shelves until he finds what he's looking for. He pulls a small cardboard box off a shelf and retrieves a smaller packet from inside. It's SOAP.

As he goes to leave, Maggie bars his exit.

MAGGIE
The dishes can wait.

She grabs Isaac's wrist and starts to drag him to the doorway that leads to the commons area. He pulls away from Maggie and plants his feet.

ISAAC
I didn't ask you to come here and
save me.

MAGGIE
The Hordes are massacring us out
there.

ISAAC
Then you should get back to the
Wall.

Isaac limps out of the storage room. He paws the wall on the way, careful not to lose his bearings.

INT. MAKESHIFT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

As he makes it back to the sink, he feels carefully around and brushes away glass and ceramic from the stacks of dishes.

He feels for the remainder of the dirty stack, grabs a glass and starts washing with the newly acquired cleaner.

When he finishes he SQUEAKS the glass with his good thumb and places it to his right in the remains of the clean dishes pile.

MAGGIE
Isaac-

ISAAC
I don't want to hear it, Maggie.

MAGGIE
Please-

Isaac slams his fist on the counter, careful not to break the glass he has just picked up.

ISAAC
Enough.

He turns to face her, she's far enough away that he has to judge her location based on her voice.

ISAAC
This is all I've got. You don't know what it's like. Living like this.

Maggie wants to speak, restrains herself, but Isaac senses her urge.

ISAAC
You can't. Spending every night seeing their horrible faces wracked in pain and confusion. Waking up every morning in a cold sweat, struggling just to get out of bed. Having some stranger dress me and help me here...

Isaac turns back to the dishes and grabs another piece of dinnerware.

ISAAC
But at least while I'm here, I have a purpose. Clean the dishes. It's not much, but it's the only thing I trust myself to do well anymore.

Isaac finishes another plate, SQUEAKS it, and puts it in the clean dishes pile.

Maggie walks up behind him. She tries to hand him another plate.

ISAAC
No, dammit. Aren't you listening to me?

He pushes her hand aside and grabs one on his own.

MAGGIE

Fine, Isaac, but staying is a death sentence. The plates will be here tomorrow.

ISAAC

They're dirty today.

He pauses to reflect on the dish in his hand. He draws his thumb across it, but it doesn't make a sound so he keeps cleaning.

ISAAC

They're dirty today, and when General Callahan's done beating-

MAGGIE

Callahan's an idiot. Dogs lead men better.

ISAAC

When he's done beating back the Hordes, his soldiers are going to want to eat. And they're not going to get some disease because I let food rot on a plate I should have cleaned.

(beat)

We die enough around here as it is without me contributing to the problem.

Isaac SQUEAKS the surface of his current dish and places it to his right. Maggie touches his hand as he does so.

MAGGIE

Isaac...

He looks directly at her, surprised by the human contact.

ISAAC

You know, this close...

(sighs)

I'd forgotten how beautiful you are.

Isaac wipes away grime from her face with his good thumb.

MAGGIE

I miss you. We all miss you on the Wall. You were always the one that gave us strength. When it...happened, things changed up there. It's not the same.

Isaac pulls his hand from Maggie's and grabs another dish. He wipes it, violently, and it CRACKS. He throws the broken plate on the ground and shakes the soap from his hands.

ISAAC

What did you get out of that?

He paws around the edges of the counter looking for something. When he doesn't find it he limps in the direction of a small pantry closet.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry, I don't know why...it's just that when I see you like this...

Isaac stops mid-stride to respond to her.

ISAAC

You what? You pity me? That it?

Maggie can't meet Isaac's gaze, she looks away from him. Her silence is enough of an answer.

ISAAC

Take it somewhere else, I've got enough of my own.

He finishes the trek to the small closet. Though he can't see her, Maggie watches with concern at each step he makes. Isaac gropes within the pantry looking for something.

MAGGIE

Oh, Isaac, I don't pity you because of what happened to you. I pity you because of what you let it do to you.

ISAAC

(sarcastic)

Your compassion is overwhelming. Please, stop.

The dismissal presses all the right buttons, and Maggie reacts.

MAGGIE

You're a fucking coward. You pretend like this is some god damned courageous effort, fighting a hidden war where you're the only soldier.

ISAAC
You think so, huh?

MAGGIE
The world we live in, no one gives
a god damn about plates. If they
had to they'd eat out of their
hats. But here you are, bombs
falling from the sky, cleaning the
dishes.
(beat)
Fuck the dishes.

Maggie walks over to the sink, and swipes her arm across the pile of dirty plates and silverware, knocking them to the ground. They shatter with a deafening noise.

MAGGIE
Do you hear me?

Maggie walks over to Isaac, getting uncomfortably close to him.

MAGGIE
(whispering)
What are you going to do about it?

He spins on his heel neatly and thrusts the base of his palm into Maggie's solar plexus. Isaac's speed catches her off guard. The wind is knocked out of her as she stumbles away, doubled over in pain.

His next blow takes advantage of her exposed state. He brings his knee into her forehead, and the impact of the blow sends Maggie to the floor. Isaac stumbles a bit, but regains his balance quickly.

Maggie laughs as she rises, feeling the blood on her head.

ISAAC
You embarrassed that a cripple
kicked your ass?

MAGGIE
No, just glad to see you still have
some fight in you.

Isaac turns back to the pantry. He's finally found what he was looking for: A BROOM.

He makes his way to the shattered remnants of his plates and begins sweeping the ceramic from the floor as best he can.

MAGGIE

I get it. It's not so much about the plates now, as long as there's something you can be doing. Is that it?

Isaac continues to sweep, he doesn't acknowledge Maggie's presence. A stern look washes over her face, and she storms from the kitchen.

INT. PUBLIC COMMONS - MOMENTS LATER

Maggie pushes the already open door separating the commons from the kitchen further ajar.

She walks around the space, the bombs have left much of it in rubble. The Horde's attacks have resumed on this area of the city and the sounds of explosions and gunfire fill the air.

She surveys the space quickly, finds a suitable instrument: A FLAG POLE holding a flag that bears the insignia of their small town.

MAGGIE

You'll do.

She rips the flag from the pole and unceremoniously drops it to the ground.

MAGGIE

Sorry, Elders, I need this more than your flag does.

She KICKS OFF THE BASE of the brass pole and walks, shoulder forward, back into the kitchen.

INT. MAKESHIFT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Her pace is fast and determined. She raises the pole above her head. She prepares her attack and SWINGS with all her might.

Her blow does not strike home. Isaac deflects it deftly with his broom, though the blow BREAKS IT IN HALF.

Isaac brings the business end of the broken broom down on the counter, BREAKING off the bristles. He now has two very capable staffs, one in each hand.

His fine motor skills are not what they used to be, but he still grasps his makeshift weapons ably.

MAGGIE

Good.

The two fight. Though Maggie's weapon is heavier and each blow more painful, it slows her attacks allowing Isaac to counter with his more nimble wooden staffs.

The sound of wood on metal, metal on bone, wood on bone echo through the remains of the tiled kitchen, as two master warriors battle amidst the sound of falling bombs.

The building seems to come apart around them as they fight.

Neither have the upper hand for a while. As one then the other gains the advantage, they push the battle from the kitchen to the commons and back again.

It's as if they know each others' offensive strategy, know exactly how their foe will act before they make their move. Each missed blow is so close they can feel the disturbed air on their skin as weapons fly by.

Everything falls away as they do battle. The world is forgotten, the bombs, the attack, the broken plates, nothing seems to faze them.

Maggie, being unimpaired has the advantage, with a few lucky counter attacks, she gains the upper hand and finally leaves Isaac defenseless on the floor panting.

The battle has taken its toll on Maggie as well, and she stands out of breath over Isaac. She throws her brass pole aside and lowers her guard.

MAGGIE

Broken men don't fight like that.

ISAAC

You were going easy on me-

MAGGIE

I wasn't. It's just...usually I try to kill people with guns.

Isaac forces his breathing to slow. He actually allows Maggie to help him stand. He directs her to the counter, and he leans at its edge, staring at the remaining clean plates stacked neatly to the right of the sink.

ISAAC

How do I go on like this? Dependent on some nursemaid to wipe my ass and feed me with a spoon.

MAGGIE

The man you are when you fight, he
doesn't need those things.

Isaac feels for a clean plate. He picks it up, SQUEAKS it thoughtfully, and places it neatly back in the stack. Suddenly he lashes out and pushes the whole stack on the floor, they SHATTER IN A CLATTERING CACOPHONY OF NOISE.

ISAAC

Two fucking years I've done this.
Standing in this spot, wiping away
food from what? Bits of ceramic?

MAGGIE

It's not too late. The men need a
leader.

ISAAC

What about Callahan?

MAGGIE

With any luck he's already dead.

ISAAC

(knowingly)
We can hope.

MAGGIE

One of your gifts has always been
leading soldiers. You can still do
that. Better than Callahan ever
could.

Isaac doesn't respond. He looks in silence at the mess on the floor contemplatively.

MAGGIE

We need someone to trust.

ISAAC

I-I'm not your-

MAGGIE

You're it.

(beat)

You can stand here and wallow in
your self-pity, or you can accept
the fact that there are people who
need you.

ISAAC
I need to clean this-

MAGGIE
With what? I broke your broom.

ISAAC
(sighing)
So you did.
(beat)
I can't get to the Wall alone,
Maggie.

MAGGIE
I'll be by your side. You're
running out of excuses, man.

Isaac leans on the counter behind him and takes in this concrete prison of his own making. He chuckles quietly to himself with a realization.

ISAAC
This was your plan the whole time.

MAGGIE
You think I "accidentally" burst
into your kitchen in the middle of
a ground invasion? I'm a little
insulted here.

ISAAC
That took some serious stones.
(beat)
How's Callahan structuring the
attack?

MAGGIE
Attack? He's circling the wagons.

ISAAC
Jesus, he'll blow any advantage you
have.

Maggie gives a look as if to indicate what an obvious statement that is.

Isaac scratches the top of his head with his good thumb and sighs.

ISAAC
Take me there.

Maggie smiles, she walks over to Isaac and puts her arm around his. He pulls away almost immediately.

ISAAC

I'm blind, not old. Just make sure
my ass doesn't get shot.

Maggie walks ahead of Isaac and kicks out the remains of the
service door she entered before.

MAGGIE

Lead the way, Oh Captain My
Captain.

ISAAC

Don't call me that.

Isaac limps toward the doorway with renewed confidence.

EXT. CITY PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

As he approaches, Maggie exits and recons the surroundings.

MAGGIE

We're clear.

She takes a defensive position in front of Isaac, her back
to him. He puts his hand on her shoulder.

ISAAC

Maggie, if we live through this-

MAGGIE

(almost flattered)

Isaac-

ISAAC

I'm going to put you in for the
mother of all promotions.

Based on her disappointed expression Isaac's statement seems
to differ from Maggie's expectations, but after a moment she
grins.

MAGGIE

Thank you, sir.

They move as quickly as possible through the debris of the
destroyed city, keeping low, heading to the Wall and Isaac's
new purpose.

FADE TO BLACK