

## **AMIDST IT ALL**

I almost hear my heart drop as my fingers tremble, and I feel a cold sweat developing on my creased brows. "*Anything but this*", I whisper, standing face-to-face against my fearsome opponent. With each passing moment, the thump of my heartbeat increases in volume, and I find my strength and determination failing to overpower my terror - yet, a revelation dawns upon me, and I finally surrender. My enemy - the dishes - aren't going to do themselves, and the Magic Fairy I once relied on can no longer save the day.

During a time when Santa Claus' existence was more prominent than climate change, I entrusted my chores to the Magic Fairy - her presence vivid, despite the fictitious name she carried.

During warm summer days, when the neighborhood park was filled with laughing children and excited shrieks that could be heard from blocks away, I would frantically rush outside, knowing the Fairy would complete my household duties in my absence. Each day, without fail, I returned home to find my toys, previously splayed across the floor, neatly organized in a box. Yet, now as I look upon the towering stack of dirty dishes, threatening to topple

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over, and spread like weeds across the kitchen counter, I feel abandoned by my Magic Fairy. Dread, much like the stubborn stains clinging to the dishes, has consumed my life since the day of the diagnosis.

I grip the sole vacant corner of the countertop and peer over the mountain of dishes to look out the window. I find my mother in the backyard, basking in the warm heat of the sun, in its final moments before it begins to set. She holds a large bag of markers and a pile of cardstock on her lap. The chair adjacent to hers is filled with brightly colored, square-shaped "Thank You" cards, decorated with simple drawings of flowers and hearts.

Despite the newfound smile that has crept onto her face, evidently from the peace she has found in card-making, her weariness is evident in the wrinkles etched onto her face. I hope that her exhaustion doesn't translate into her letters, as they intend to comfort the recipients more than herself. It's impossible to keep an illness like hers a secret, with its physical and emotional side-effects - the evidence found in her fatigue, constant nausea, and thinning hair.

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Since sharing the news, our mailbox has always been filled to the brim with countless letters from loved ones. Having regained some strength since her last chemotherapy appointment, she writes in return, feeling obligated to repay the effort. Her once strong fingers, capable of tackling the dishes, have now found their limit at crafting these cards.

I let go of the counter to return to the revolting task at hand. Having put it off for days, the inevitability dawned upon me the night before. Half asleep, I groggily ventured to the kitchen for a midnight snack, where I almost mistook the tall pile of dishes for an intruder. Now, I find myself facing the dishes in place of my mother, whose brittle fingers can no longer withstand the heat of the water, nor can her legs support her body for the time it would take to get through the heaps of dirty tableware. I fear that if she were to attempt such a chore, her nails, weakened from the medication, would begin to chip away faster than the dried-up food stuck to the cutlery.

My father, too emotionally broken from seeing my mother in her state of illness, has thrown himself entirely into work,

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becoming too ignorant of the home, the child, that still needs his attention. As a result of my father's laxness, or due to my disgust at the state of our kitchen, I muster the motivation to face the chore I despise the most. For my father to come home to a clean house, or for my mother, the Magic Fairy who allowed me to play while taking on the burden of my tasks.

If not for my deep hatred of dirty dishes, I would find it humorous how it takes all my psychological force to grab the first plate. Dirty with the remnants of beans and rice, a recipe I stumbled upon online and finally managed to make taste edible after several attempts, I realize immediately that this was one of my 'failed' tries. I turn on the tap, finding it difficult to maneuver with all the other dishes occupying space in the sink. I grimace as chunks of dirty food fall onto my hand, crunchy and wet. It takes much longer than I originally anticipated, and hoped, for the dish to be sparkling clean. With my arm aching after rigorous scrubbing, I switch hands for the next plate.

Lost in thought to distract myself from the slimy residue slipping between my fingers, I wonder if this could all be

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cruel karma for my irresponsibility as a child. Perhaps I'm finally being punished for choosing to abandon my chores each day, for deluding myself into believing that all the effort it took was a whisk of the Magic Fairy's wand. Nonetheless, I accept it, and for hours, I endure the task I hate the most until my fingers wrinkle and my arms ache.

As time faded away, I eventually grew accustomed to the amount of soap each dish required, as well as the exact angle the water must hit the spoon to avoid splashing me.

The sun has set, leaving a windy chill in its wake. My mother finally calls out for me, the darkness hindering her ability to write any more cards. As I hurry to help her carry the endless number of letters she wrote today, I take one last glance at the kitchen. I can't help but gaze with pride at the empty, clean sink. Beyond the organized pile of drying dishes, I notice a stack of unopened mail, groceries, and my math homework scattered around the rest of the kitchen. A new knot forms in my stomach and an overwhelming feeling begins to settle in my chest, but amidst it all, the dishes gleam.