

THE DISHWASHER PRINCIPLE  
by Matthew Flanzer

April 19, 2002  
Sixth draft (6B)

1403 N. Edgemont St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90027  
*flanzer@usc.edu*  
(213) 926- 3038

FADE IN:

EXT. A LONELY ROAD – CALIFORNIA DESERT – SUNSET

A star-filled sky stands as a velvet backdrop behind distant mountains. BLUEGRASS music.

From a small roadside diner, held out like a hitchhiker extending a thumb to catch a ride, a neon sign flickers desperately – “EAT”.

INT. DINER KITCHEN

The BLUEGRASS is muffled inside the Diner’s small kitchen.

QUICK MONTAGE – a fury of food preparation

The chef is

EDGAR,

a handsome man in his twenties. He drops the thin garlic slices into a CASSEROLE dish on the counter. Focused on his task, he fails to notice when a DOOR CHIME signals the arrival of customers.

INT. DINER RESTAURANT

Walking into the diner are STATLER and WALDORF, older men dressed in plaid and tweed, respectively. They pass by the booths with aged upholstery and the windows which look out to distant desert nothingness, to take adjacent seats at the counter.

INT. KITCHEN

Edgar tears small bits of parsley to add to the casserole.

STATLER (O. S.)  
Hey, Eddie!

Looking up from his task, he puts the casserole into an oven, turns an electric timer, and walks out to the restaurant.

He passes by LANCE, a large African-American man, about Edgar’s age, with a head full of impressive dreadlocks, standing by the large kitchen sink, full of suds.

INT. RESTAURANT

Edgar walks in to find Statler and Waldorf sitting at the counter.

EDGAR  
What'll you have?

WALDORF  
Nice to see you, too.

EDGAR  
Let me guess. Two of Pop's burgers.

STATLER  
What else?

Statler smiles at Waldorf who nods back in agreement. Edgar indignantly heads back to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

CU. BUBBLING HAMBURGER ON HOT GRILL

A shiny spatula presses the meat onto the hot surface.

ABOVE THE GRILL,

Edgar stares vacantly ahead, daydreaming.

INT. RESTAURANT

With a delicate CHIME, the swinging door opens. In SLO-MO enters a FANTASY WOMAN replete with the looks of a magazine cover model. A strange wind blows through her hair. She saunters forward in tight red pants and a thin, white T-shirt which reads "MEAT IS MURDER".

FANTASY WOMAN  
(seductively, slowly)  
You're such the gourmet, Edgar.

The fantasy is suddenly interrupted - BUZZ!!!

INT. DINER KITCHEN

The electric oven timer is BUZZING. Edgar's focus is returned as turns to face

THE SINK.

Nodding slowly as he scrubs, Lance is altogether in his own world.

EDGAR (O. S.)  
Lance!

Lance stops scrubbing to remove a pair of HEADPHONES hidden under his dreads. He's been listening to the same BLUEGRASS music. He smiles at Edgar from behind glazed eyes.

EDGAR (CONT' D)

I need you to clean the good plates. She should be here soon.

LANCE

You're sweating.

EDGAR

Never mind. Just clean the plates.

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, Edgar carries out the hamburgers on plates.

Behind the grill, on the wall, a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH shows a young Edgar with an OLDER MAN wearing a apron, posed in the same kitchen. It is signed: "Pop & Eddie".

CU. POP AND EDDIE

Pop has an obvious TOUPEE, a wisp of which curls curiously back over the top of the his head.

INT. DINER RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Edgar tosses the plates on the counter in front of Statler and Waldorf.

STATLER

Remind me again why we come here every day, Waldorf?

WALDORF

The hospitality, Statler.

Edgar is barely paying attention as he stares towards the front door.

EDGAR

What time do you have?

WALDORF

Same as that clock over the door you keep starin' at.

STATLER

He's waiting for that new girl.

EDGAR

What do you know about it?

Edgar looks back towards the door, straightening his hair. Statler takes a big bite of burger.

WALDORF

You think you know something about her?

EDGAR

She's vegetarian. I'm vegetarian. You two moral-less geezers wouldn't understand.

STATLER

For a vegetarian, you make a damn good burger.

WALDORF

Well, his Pop taught him that much.

EDGAR

He enjoyed stuffin' you old hicks.

WALDORF

Hicks?

Waldorf points his dull knife at Edgar.

WALDORF (CONT' D)

Who you callin' a hick? We've been comin' in here practically everyday back since when your Pop, God rest his soul - back when he started this place. Stat used to change your diapers!

STATLER

Damn stinky.

WALDORF

Now, we know your Pop had his ways, and you've got yours, but...

Edgar checks his watch again.

WALDORF (CONT' D)

Hell, Statler, the boy ain't payin' no attention.

STATLER

She ain't comin'.

That draws Edgar's attention.

EDGAR

Why?

STATLER

She's sick. Witherspoon over at the Osco said she called up for some syrup to deliver it out to her place on Highway 0.

WALDORF

Hey, now, back what I was tryin' to say...

Waldorf turns back across the counter to face Edgar, but he is gone. Pausing for moment, Waldorf picks up his burger.

WALDORF (CONT' D)

Pass the catsup, Statler.

INT. KITCHEN

Edgar comes charging in through swinging doors.

EDGAR

Lance!

Lance removes his headphones again, puts down a soapy pot.

EDGAR (CONT' D)

Grab your coat.

Edgar pulls the casserole dish from the oven, covering it with a linen towel.

EDGAR

You have to drive. I'll hold this.

The door SLAMS. A piece of paper flies free of the bulletin board and lands on the hot grill. It begins to SMOLDER.

INT. DINER RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Statler and Waldorf look up from their dinners and stare curiously back into the kitchen before returning to eat.

INT. KITCHEN

On the grill, the paper, an order for hamburgers, begins to burn.

I/E. A CHEVY NOVA - SUNSET (MOVING)

Lance drives. Edgar throws his apron into the back seat.

EDGAR

I'm just so sick of this place. Making hamburgers just makes me sick.

Lance looks at Edgar curiously.

EDGAR (CONT' D)

You don't know what it's like. I didn't ask to inherit that greasy place, flippin' flesh all day long. I could be a great chef. I could be in Paris. I could be in New York.

Edgar holds up the casserole dish.

EDGAR (CONT' D)

Hell, you wouldn't understand. You didn't know my father.

LANCE

Yes, I did.

EDGAR

You weren't his son. He pitied you. You just smoke dope, wear your headphones, eat *my* food, and wash dishes all day long...

LANCE

Yeah, it is an ideal job.

Edgar looks off, out the windows.

EDGAR

You're a dishwasher! Haven't you ever wanted to change for something more?

LANCE (CONT' D)

Let me tell you a story. In ancient China, there lived a stonecutter who toiled all day under the hot Sun.

The car continues down the

TWO-LANE BLACKTOP.

LANCE (CONT' D)

One day, he looked up into the bright sunlight and wished that he might be as strong as the Sun. And without warning, he became the Sun and shone down with might on all below him.

INT. RESTAURANT

Statler and Waldorf are finishing their hamburgers.

LANCE (CONT' D) (O. S.)  
 Until suddenly, a cloud passed under him  
 and blocked his light from the Earth. How  
 strong that cloud is, he thought, to block  
 the Sun. I wish I was a cloud.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SUNSET

The neon sign flickers desperately.

LANCE (CONT' D) (O. S.)  
 And then he was the Cloud. He would  
 provide shade to the Earth from the hot  
 Sun. He drifted merrily along...

INT. KITCHEN

An empty pot floats on the soapy water in the sink.

LANCE (CONT' D) (O. S.)  
 Until he was stopped by a tall range of  
 mountains. Impressed by the height and  
 majesty of the mountains, he made yet  
 another wish and became those mountains.

EXT. DISTANT MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The MOON rises above the distant mountains.

LANCE (CONT' D) (O. S.)  
 He remained quite proud until, one day, he  
 felt a sharp pain, and looking down, saw  
 chipping away at the mountain, a  
 stonecutter.

I/E. CHEVY NOVA - NIGHT (MOVING)

Lance finishes his story as Edgar eyes him suspiciously.

EDGAR  
 So, the moral is that everything has a  
 negative side to it.

LANCE  
 There is no negative side or positive  
 side. The moral is that you don't need to  
 change - just open up your perspective.

EDGAR  
 Cow.

Lance, puzzled, turns back front. He SLAMS THE BRAKES.

OUT THE WINDOW,

The headlights of the car illuminate a LARGE COW, standing in the road.

EXT. DIRT ROAD – NIGHT

The Nova's headlamps backlight the LARGE COW. It stands motionless, chewing its cud. Dust from the car's braking hangs in the air.

INT. NOVA

Edgar and Lance stare at the cow, and then each other, bewildered. Edgar reaches across and hits the CAR HORN.

OUTSIDE (WIDE),

The cow looks over to the car, but does not move. The CAR HORN blasts continuously.

IN THE CAR,

Lance shrugs. Edgar hands the casserole dish over to Lance, and exits the car.

EXT. DIRT ROAD – NIGHT

Edgar approaches the cow, waiving his arms bizarrely.

EDGAR

The way I see it! Fuck this shit! Fucking cow! Move!

The cow is motionless as Edgar approaches, turning its head toward Edgar.

CU. COW

A reminiscent lick of hair curls curiously back over the top of the cow's head.

EDGAR

slows as he approaches.

CU. COW

The chewing cow stares at Edgar. There's something about that hair!

CU. EDGAR

Edgar stares back. He squats down in the road and starts to laugh.

BACK TO SCENE

Squatting in the road, Edgar chuckles, smiles at the cow.

The cow looks blankly at Edgar, then –

COW (A MALE VOICE)

Why do you make me out to be the bad guy, Edgar?

EDGAR

Pop?

COW

Yeah, Eddie. It's me.

EDGAR

You're a cow.

COW

Yeah, well it turns out the Hindus were right 'bout a few things. It's complicated. Look, Edgar, I'm worried about you. You abandoned the diner. Where are you going?

EDGAR

I'm delivering dinner.

COW

I don't think you know what you're doing. Do you really know anything about this woman you're off to see?

EDGAR

She's a vegetarian. I'm a vegetarian.

COW

You said that before. Look, if you're going to run the diner you can't just...

EDGAR

(interrupting)

I didn't ask to run the diner, Pop. I didn't ask to fry gross, unhealthy food everyday. I didn't ask for that. I could be a great chef. I could... I could...

Edgar trails off. In the distance, another cow MOOS.

COW

Don't feel trapped, son. You're not..  
Change the menu. Close the diner. Runnin'  
ain't never solved nothin'. Hell, when I  
started out here, there was nothing.

EDGAR

There still is nothing, Pop.

COW

The diner is something. The folks here  
need that. They need you.

EDGAR

Who? Waldorf? Statler?

COW

Statler used to change your damn stinky  
diapers.

EDGAR

I know.

COW

Go back to the diner. Don't go chasing  
some woman you know nothing about. Your  
Mom and Me didn't raise no fool.

Edgar gets up.

EDGAR

I know what I'm doing. Just get out of the  
road.

Walking back to the car, Edgar stops with his back turned.

EDGAR (CONT' D)

How is Mom?

COW

Oh, real good. She's in television,  
advertising for some computer company. I'm  
real proud of the woman.

Edgar smiles and turns back to face the cow, his father.

EDGAR

How come your a cow, Pop, and not a bull?

COW

I think that's enough father-son time for today. I gotta mosey along. The little woman will be wondering where I grazed to. I hope you know what you're doing. Good luck.

EDGAR

Thanks, Pop.

The cow turns, starts to wander off.

COW (O.S.)

Oh, and Eddie, some of the others asked me to say thanks for not eating them.

INT. NOVA

The car stereo is playing more BLUEGRASS as Edgar gets back into the car. Lance sits smiling at him from under glazed eyes. Edgar turns to him as if to ask a question, but thinks better of it.

EDGAR

This is turning into the strangest evening.

Edgar remembers the casserole dish.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

Have you been eating this?

LANCE

It smelled so good.

Edgar grabs the dish back from him.

EDGAR

Let's go. It's getting cold. Drive.

The Nova starts up and continues onward.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

The Nova heads down the road, passing a road sign which reads, "HIGHWAY 0".

EXT. SMALL HOUSE - NIGHT

The Nova parks in front of a small farm house. Edgar walks to the front door.

Adjusting his wavy hair, Edgar knocks. In one hand he holds the casserole dish. The other he holds quickly to his mouth, exhales sharply, and sniffs his breath.

The door opens. Standing there is the FANTASY WOMAN. This time she looks quite different. Wearing ordinary blue jeans and a sweatshirt, she stands in the doorway, a BABY GIRL holds on her shoulder.

FANTASY WOMAN

Yeah?

Edgar is puzzled.

FANTASY WOMAN (CONT' D)

Hey, you're that guy from the diner.

EDGAR

I heard you were sick.

FANTASY WOMAN

Me? Oh, no. Anna here. But, she's feeling much better now, thanks. Witherspoon from the Osco brought some syrup. What's that?

Edgar holds up the casserole.

EDGAR

I brought you your dinner. All vegetarian. For you. I made it special for you.

FANTASY WOMAN

Now why did you do that? I switched diets, anyway. I'm doing that high protein thing, now. Lots of steak. I think it's going to do wonders for my skin.

The woman takes a long drag from a cigarette. She takes the casserole dish from Edgar, slipping it from under the dish towel.

FANTASY WOMAN (CONT' D)

Thanks a lot, though.

Edgar looks behind her into the small house. It's a hastily arranged abode with second-hand appointments. Edgar begins to realize his folly.

FANTASY WOMAN (CONT' D)

Was there something else?

EDGAR

You look different.

From inside the house -

FANTASY HUSBAND (O. S.)  
Hey, Doris, who was it?

DORIS (FANTASY WOMAN)  
It's the guy from the diner, hon. He brought dinner.

FANTASY HUSBAND (O. S.)  
That's mighty nice. Invite him in for a beer.

Doris (the Fantasy Woman) raises an eyebrow. Suddenly, she shifts the baby on her shoulder.

DORIS  
Uh-oh. Hon! Time to change Anna!

FANTASY HUSBAND (O. S.)  
Damn stinky diapers!

Doris remembers Edgar at the door and tries composing herself.

DORIS  
Sorry. You wanna come in? *Matlock* is on.

Edgar's discovery is complete. He looks relaxed. He swings the dish towel over his shoulder.

EDGAR  
No, thanks. I think I'm needed, back at the diner. Good night.

I/E. NOVA - NIGHT

Edgar gets back into the car. Lance waits silently.

EDGAR  
Let's go home, Lance.

Lance starts the Nova.

EDGAR (CONT' D)  
You hungry?

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - LATER - NIGHT

The Nova pulls into a the parking lot. RED FLASHING LIGHTS fill the area.

Jumping out the car, Edgar runs through a pond of standing water towards the diner but is stopped next to a FIRE TRUCK by a FIREMAN. Edgar strains against him.

EDGAR

No! What happened!?

There has been a small fire. The diner stands, but has smoke and water damage. Statler and Waldorf come to Edgar's side. Other FIREMEN clean up the area.

STATLER

A small fire. It started pretty soon after you left. Waldorf and I tried to do something, but, heck, all that grease... *poof!* Waldorf here called the fire trucks...

WALDORF

Stat and I grabbed what we could. Here.

He hands Edgar a few items: the CLOCK from over the door, a NAPKIN DISPENSER, a bottle of CATSUP, and then, the FRAMED PHOTO of Edgar and his father.

Edgar stares at the picture. The flashing lights reflect off of the picture glass. LANCE comes over and puts his hand back on Edgar's shoulder.

EDGAR (CONT' D)

Thanks, Waldorf. Statler.

STATLER

Sorry we couldn't get more.

EDGAR

Statler, Waldorf, I'm sorry I called you hicks before.

WALDORF

Apology accepted.

They watch as the firemen clean up the mess.

EDGAR

What am I going to do?

WALDORF

Don't worry, Edgar. We'll help you rebuild. It'll be exactly like before.

EDGAR

I don't know.

WALDORF

What are you saying? You're not gonna reopen? What's a community without a diner? We need that diner.

Edgar looks down to the photograph.

EDGAR

You mean you need my father.

WALDORF

We could've stopped coming back after Pop passed on, but we didn't. We kept coming because of you. You're the best cook...

STATLER

Chef.

WALDORF

...chef we've ever known, and begging his pardon, a lot better than Pop ever was.

EDGAR

All you ever eat is hamburgers. I just can't make any more hamburgers.

WALDORF

Well... um... well, we could try some other things.

Waldorf looks towards Statler for backup.

STATLER

That's right. We could change.

EDGAR

You don't need to change, Statler.

Edgar looks up, and over to Lance. The dishwasher nods in approval.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

Just open up your perspective.

INT. NEW DINER RESTAURANT – MONTHS LATER

Lively BLUEGRASS fills the air.

CU. ELEGANT VEGETARIAN ENTREE ON PLATE

A WAITRESS carries the steaming plate over to a table in the

## REDECORATED RESTAURANT

It is much more elegant than before, transforming the greasy diner into a stylish affair.

The waitress walks through the room, picking up a check. Every table is full. The clientele's COLORFUL RURAL ATTIRE stands out from the white linen tablecloths. Two FIREMEN sit at a far table. DORIS AND HER HUSBAND are at another.

She continues passed a small RAISED PLATFORM in the corner of the room. Two young musicians play BLUEGRASS MUSIC.

The waitress stops at a table and pulls out her ORDER BOOK. The customers at the table read from menus: "EDGAR'S EPICUREAN: FINEST IN VEGETARIAN CUISINE".

Across the room, at the

COUNTER,

sit Statler and Waldorf. The plates in front of each hold colorful, extravagant vegetarian meals.

STATLER

So I told Witherspoon, over at the Osco, rice and beans. Simple. There's your complete protein. It's all in that Robbins's book.

Waldorf continues to eat.

STATLER (CONT' D)

Good old rice and beans – hell, remember those beans we got back in the war?

WALDORF

Shut-up, Statler. Pass the Balsamic, please.

Watching everything through a WINDOW FROM THE KITCHEN is Edgar, wearing a tall CHEF HAT, looking content.

INT. NEW DINER KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

Edgar walks back into his kitchen. On the way, he stops by the sink to pat Lance on the shoulder. Lance pulls a pair of HEADPHONES over his ears, behind dreadlocks. The MUSIC SHRINKS into the muffled headphones.

EXT. A ROAD LESS LONELY – NIGHT

Loping slowly out of the diner parking lot, full of cars, from under a neon sign flickering “EAT”, a LONE COW walks down the long road toward distant mountains.

The BLUEGRASS MUSIC SWELLS.

FADE OUT.

THE END.