

2040

As light seeps into her room through the edges of blackout curtains, Jacqueline inhales and tries to remember what about this day is different. She knows there's something she needs to focus on even as she turns to look at her husband instead of getting up. *It's a Saturday, so it isn't getting funding for Monarch research...* Fighting the urge to go back to bed (and stay there forever), she sits up and checks her calendar on the wall.

"Debate day?" She mumbles. The public discussion over plastic storage wasn't supposed to be until 10. Nothing to worry about for at least another hour. Though, the sun wasn't usually up by 7 in the middle of winter. She turned to check the time, and it was *eight thirty??* She needed to be out of the house by nine thirty! And get her notes set up!

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Jacqueline breathed in and out before sitting down at her council seat. Thank goodness Charles always made breakfast on weekends, she would've had to skip it otherwise. Funny how the reason she was voted in was due to being a regular person with regular struggles, even though those regular struggles made her job ten times more difficult. *Thanks, depression and working class background.*

“Alright, let’s get the discussion started,” said Colin Senate, one of the more annoying members. “Jacky, why don’t you start us off?” A bad decision on his part, intended to make him seem closer to her to capitalize off her growing popularity.

“Thank you, Mr. Senate. I’d appreciate it if you called me Mrs. Sullivan.” Jacqueline hoped that wouldn’t make him angry enough to buy out a random thing she

liked. It had happened to another council member before. She made a note to never disclose where she got her silk pillowcases from. “We are here to discuss plastic storage and possible reuse. Though storage in Low Earth Orbit is a way to reduce the amount of landfill space on Earth, the emissions from putting the plastic there make reuse a more viable option. After all, we’ve had the ability to recycle plastic almost indefinitely since 2036.”

“But what about microplastics?” Ms. Carbona chimed in. “We have better filters, but if people use their reused plastic outside, they could cause harm to wildlife and plants or get into our food supply.”

“Recycled plastic is required to have a layer of recycled silicone on top to prevent breakdown,” argues Mr. Jackson. “All of the most harmful plastics have already been banned from production and use globally, and are safely stored in sealed vaults underground. We’re talking

about the least harmful of the bunch. We can't just ban a substance used in the medical field and helpful for disabled people.”

Jacqueline rubbed at her forehead. *Both groups have some good points. Both groups have huge companies lobbying for them. It's illegal to pay us now, but how many of us are being bribed in secret? Is recycling really the best option here?* She sighed and continued with the discussion, missing the days when she worked in an entomology lab, but glad she could do something for those bugs.

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“Hi, J.” Charles handed Jacqueline a mug of tea almost immediately after she got home, before she could even take off her shoes. “While you were at your meeting, I finally saw that Northern Flicker we've been hearing. It's a smaller bird than I expected.” He smiled as she took a

sip of her tea. *Lavender today. Not really sure if this counts as tea since it's made with lavender sugar, but at least it tastes nice.* “How was your meeting? Come to any conclusions yet?”

“Oh, we probably won't have anything figured out until Friday. There'll probably be some new study that proves half of us wrong or proposes a new idea and then we'll have to course correct.” Jacqueline leaned against her husband as they watched bees fly from one flower to another from their kitchen window. They'd started to notice miner bees popping up in their garden a couple years ago, and they had more seeds to collect at the end of that summer than any years before the bees' little ant-like burrows popped up. “I just hope we do the *right* thing, you know?”

“I think you will. I believe in you, at least, and I'm sure most other people will figure it out too.” He pointed at

a miner bee currently perched upon a lavender plant, maybe the same one used to make her tea. “We’ve already come so far. The burrows those bees made used to be flooded with water or pesticides because people didn’t want to be stung. And 20 years ago, I might have even agreed with it.” He sneakily stole the tea mug and took a sip before handing it back before Jacqueline could laugh. “But now, thanks to people like you, the average person is happy when they see a burrow, and knows that bees don’t want to hurt you, and maybe even studies their pollination patterns for a school project. And thanks to you, I’m not somebody who hates bugs anymore.”

“Thank you.” Jacqueline passed him the tea mug again. “Hopefully I’m as good at convincing the world not to use explosives to send tons of plastic into space as I am convincing you that bugs are adorable.” Her eyes looked upwards at the sky, where stars were just about to

blink into visibility. Soon they'd either turn out all the lights or put up blackout curtains to ensure those stars stayed bright and clear. Sometimes the weight of the recovering environment was reassuring, a reminder that the Earth hadn't managed to blow itself up, but some nights it felt like a responsibility too heavy for her to carry.

As the stars began to shine, Jacqueline turned off the kitchen lights and went to go read on the couch with Charles. *At least I'm not doing any of this alone. I don't think anyone could bear that.*