

SAMPLE FROM

**SPOKANE  
IS STILL  
DEADER THAN DEAD**

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**Going Green**  
By Barbara Curtis

Babs stared out the kitchen window at the back lot filled with fruit trees and flowers. She methodically scrubbed the stainless steel sink while gritting her teeth at Will's tirade. She was reminded of Queen Victoria's rumored advice to "think of England" while enduring something unpleasant. Of course, the queen had been referring to sexual intercourse, an activity sadly absent from Babs' current existence. She looked beyond their property to Minnehaha Park and waited in vain for a break in the wash of words.

"I'm telling you, it is absolutely imperative that we reduce our carbon footprint. I've drawn up the plans for a full size compost bin, and here is a list of the products you will need to remove from our household."

Babs absently reached for the anti-bacterial spray. Will grabbed the can and held it as if it were a hand grenade. "Haven't you heard a word I've been saying?" he demanded.

Babs sighed and set the sponge on the counter. "Yes, I've been listening. Can't we sit down and discuss these plans?"

"There's no need for discussion. Any reasonable adult will concede

the necessity to replace products that are damaging the earth with biodegradable and recyclable cleaning agents. Here is the household list. I'm taking care of the garage."

Will handed Babs a piece of paper and strode out the back door. Babs watched the screen door ease shut on its spring mechanism and decided that ten a.m. was not too early for a drink. She poured herself a bourbon and dropped in two ice cubes before reading Will's neatly printed list. From the looks of it, he expected her to return to pioneer conditions. She tossed back the bourbon and contemplated running away from home. Unfortunately her knees were too painful at present to run anywhere and it was a ridiculous action to even consider at age sixty-two. Will's zeal to go green was driving her to irrational thinking. Her only escape these days was in tending the roses that bordered their back lot. Babs had planted a dozen varieties, including a yellow climber from her late mother's garden.

Will stomped the dirt from his shoes as he came back into the kitchen. "Haven't you boxed up those cleansers? I'm ready to head to the disposal site."

"I'll be done in a few minutes," Babs answered, setting down her empty glass. She began to remove jars and bottles from the cupboard, placing them in cardboard boxes. When Will took the first box to his car, she picked up the tub and tile spray, walked to her closet and hid it behind her shoe rack. Will should be in charge of an environmentally correct boot camp, she reflected. He was like a religious convert eager to prove his dedication. Babs folded the lid over the offending products and carried the last box out to Will's car.

When Will had first begun to spend his days reading environmentalist literature and cleaning up their property, Babs had joined in. She had been raised on a farm in Whitman County and had a healthy respect for the land. But she was soon put off by the fanatical tone of some of the pamphlets and got tired of Will's single-mindedness. She mentioned it to Deb in her yoga class who, like herself, had recently retired.

"He can't even eat dinner without mentioning which foods are cor-

rect. It's driving me crazy," she complained.

"Just be glad he sticks around home," Deb answered. "My Roger spends all his time at that casino in Idaho with his gambling buddies and he's running through our retirement money like a hot knife through butter."

In the ensuing months the entire neighborhood became aware of Will's passion. He went from house to house distributing recycling guidelines and lecturing on the importance of saving the earth. He insisted to Babs that enduring the odor emanating from his huge compost bin was a small price to pay for helping the planet. Babs knew for a fact that the outhouse she'd used as a girl at her Grandpa's cabin had been far less offensive.

She began to indulge in bourbon before lunch more frequently and avoided the back of their garden lot with the offensive bin. In fact she avoided Will as much as was feasible while living in the same modest house. Watching him adjust his glasses and adopt his self-righteous tone while spouting buzz words like "renewable resources" and "environmental impact" was more than she could bear, and she was not alone. Will's old friends from the Camera Club started acting like hospital visitors avoiding a friend with a contagious disease.

She had been removing the dead heads from her roses when the neighbor boys came zooming across the park on their bicycles. As she watched they'd sped up to pass Will who was picking up litter along the trail.

"You boys come here!" he called.

They braked to a stop.

"You need to report anyone who drops trash like this. It's impacting all of our lives. Tell your parents, too. We should all be vigilant."

"Yeah, okay." They exchanged significant looks and sped away to 7-11 where Babs suspected they would buy ice cream sandwiches and drop the wrappers in the parking lot.

Babs was mortified when her friend Marlys stopped by with the newest Mary Higgins Clark mystery for their book group and Will took the opportunity to point out that the SUV she drove was destroying life on the planet as we know it.

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Their weekly trips to Safeway became an ordeal of lengthy inspections of the food packaging with Will vetoing half of the items on Babs' grocery list.

In July he began timing her showers. In August he bullied her to throw away most of her beauty products until she wept. Babs continued to endure Will's obsession into September until the day aphids appeared on her beloved roses, including the yellow climber.

She waited until he was in the park lecturing a group of picnickers about their use of plastic bags and slipped out to buy the most potent pesticide that she could find. She bypassed River Ridge Hardware where her favorite garden shop was housed and drove out Trent Avenue to a less reputable shop in the Spokane Valley.

"You trained to use this?" the grizzled old man behind the counter asked.

"Yes." Babs raised her chin and looked him in the eye.

He set the small bottle of colorless, odorless liquid in a bag.

"TEPP is the best thing in the world for aphids, but you got to be mighty careful. Wear your gloves, long sleeves and a mask. But I expect you know that, being experienced and all."

He gave her a slow wink. Babs paid his exorbitant price and snatched the bag from the counter.

An hour later she arrived home flushed and smiling with her prize in a brown paper bag. Knowing that Will relentlessly monitored everything brought into the house or garage, she memorized the directions on the bottle of plant-saving liquid. Then she peeled off the identifying label, placing it in the paper bag. She set the bottle in the back of the cupboard where it blended in with the coffee flavorings that Will favored. It would keep until after dark when she could don protective gear and apply its contents to the roses. She picked up the paper bag and headed for the garage where she locked it in the trunk of her car.

When she stepped out of the garage, a white Prius was sitting in the driveway.

"Will, who's here?" she called as she entered the kitchen.

He appeared in the doorway with a Cheshire Cat grin. "I'm here."

“Well, who is parked in our driveway?” Babs demanded.

He adjusted his glasses and launched into a lecture about their duty to the environment and the life cycle costs of cars. Gradually, the facts bubbled up in his torrent of language and Babs realized that he had used a large chunk of their retirement funds to purchase this gleaming piece of politically correct metal. She sagged against the fence, suddenly too exhausted to deal with her fanatical husband.

“I feel a headache coming on. I’m going upstairs to take a nap,” she told Will.

“You wouldn’t get headaches if you got rid of those unhealthy cosmetics.” He shook his head.

Suspecting she would not only truly develop a headache, but also become violent if she listened any longer, Babs trotted upstairs. She turned on the ancient window fan, (Will had disposed of the air conditioner), and managed to fall asleep.

When she opened her eyes the rattling fan caused her to think for a moment that she was back home on the farm. Then she came fully awake and looked at the bedside clock. It was six-thirty p.m. Surely, Will should have called her to start dinner by now. He had set a nightly schedule of dinner by five-thirty and bedtime at nine-thirty so as to conserve electricity. She rubbed her face and headed downstairs.

The smell of coffee rose from the kitchen. Babs gave a shrill cry at the sight of the unlabeled bottle of TEPP sitting on the counter next to the organic creamer. She called Will’s name as she walked from room to room. The Prius was still parked in the driveway, a monument to Will’s green conversion. She searched the garage and yard and finally headed towards the back of the property and the malodorous compost bin.

Will’s white tennis shoes were visible over the top of the bin. Babs ran to it and touched his cold, lifeless arm. She slumped against the bin and slid to the ground. After a few minutes she raised her head and stood up. With resolute steps she walked to the house and poured herself a bourbon. She took her time to savor the drink. For

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the time being Will could give back to the earth right where he was.