





STORY 2: A Little Means A Lot

MaryAnn skipped in the house after school and went right to the list of chores her parents always left for her. She stood in front of the bulletin board in the den and read the first item on the list, "Take out the trash."

"Oh no," said MaryAnn out loud. "I'm not going anywhere near that trash can!"

"Hey, what's wrong?"

MaryAnn heard the words and felt the gentle nudge against her at the same time. She looked down to see Trashbot right beside her. It continued talking. "Only trying to help you do what's best for the environment."



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"I know," said MaryAnn, wondering what this one-time-trash-can was going to turn into now.

"But what can I do? I took the comic book out of the trash and gave it to a friend. There's not much else I can do to help the environment. I'm just a kid."

"Is that what you think?" said Trashbot. "Come on, I'll show you how you can help the environment every day."

"Where are we going?" MaryAnn wanted to know, not sure what to expect from this contraption.

"Nowhere special," it responded. "You just do what you normally do, and I'll let you know what you're doing to hurt the environment and what you can do instead to help it."

"I bet you will!" MaryAnn said. "Okay. First I'm supposed to take you out."

"Good," said Trashbot, turning back into a trash can. "Let's go!"





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MaryAnn picked up the trash can and carried it out to the big trash bins behind her apartment house. Just as she was about to dump the trash into the bin, the trash can lit up like a Christmas tree and started whistling and flashing.

"What's going on?" MaryAnn asked, setting the trash can back on the ground. "I was just putting the trash into the bin where it belongs."

"Yes, the trash belongs in the bin," Trashbot replied. "But what about all these aluminum cans, glass bottles, and newspapers in here? They're not trash. They're resources. They can be recycled."

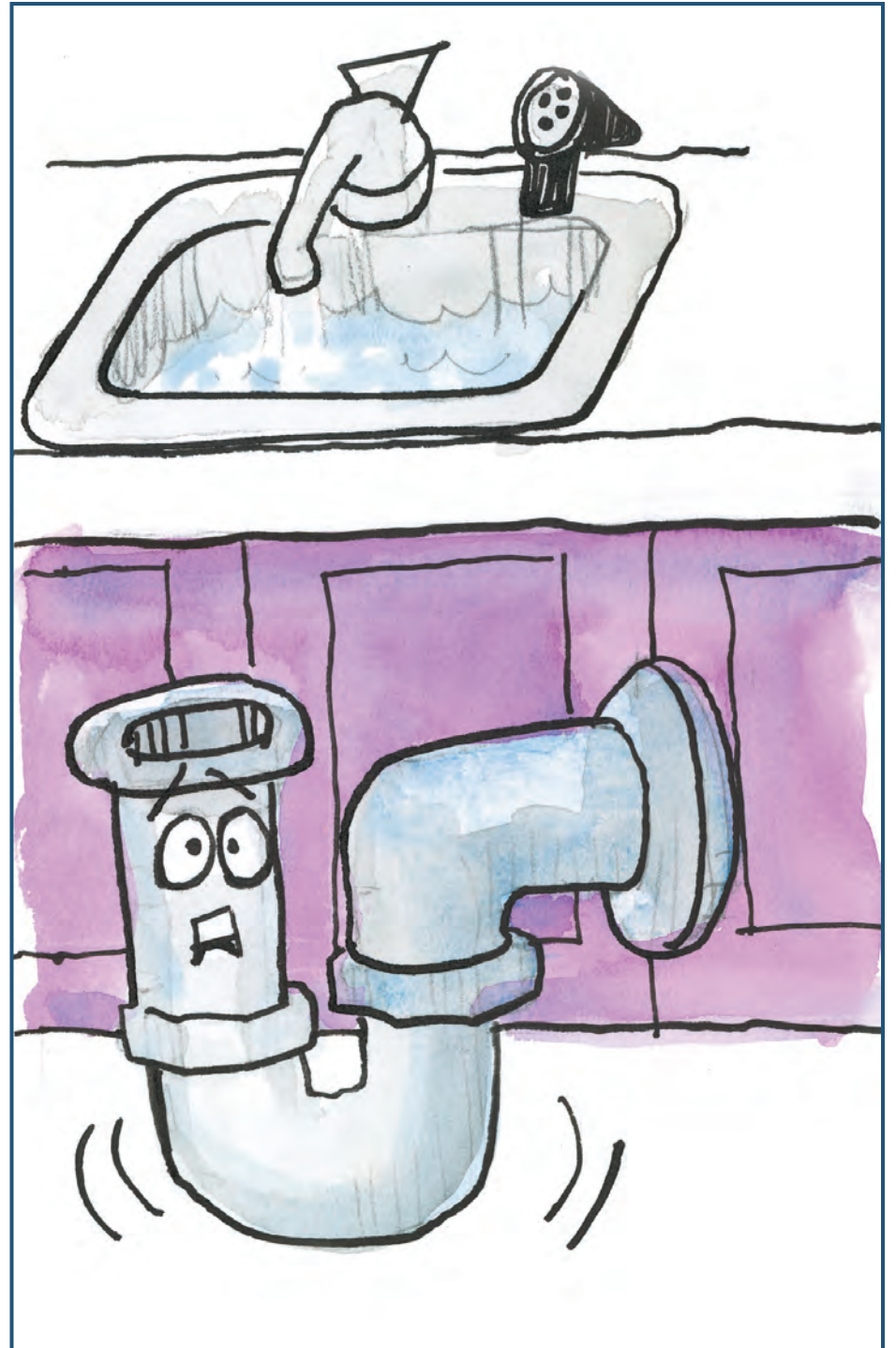
"Oh, yeah," said MaryAnn. "That's when old cans, bottles, and newspapers are used to make new ones."

"Very good," Trashbot said. "Recycling reuses the natural resources in the products and saves the energy it takes to make new products. So it's good for the environment."

"Great," said MaryAnn. "But now I've got more chores to do."



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Once MaryAnn and Trashbot were back inside, MaryAnn headed straight toward the heater thermostat. "It's cold in here," she announced.

As soon as her hand touched the thermostat, Trashbot, who now looked sort of like the vent on the top of MaryAnn's house, started rattling and coughing. MaryAnn quickly took her hand away and looked right at Trashbot.

"You could help the environment by putting on a sweatshirt instead of turning up the heat," it said.

"How's that?" she asked, not quite sure she believed that.

"Your heater," Trashbot began, "runs on natural gas, a fossil fuel. When you use your heater more than you need to, that means we must get more natural gas out of the ground, and it means that more emissions from burning the natural gas are going into the air."

"And that means more air pollution," MaryAnn chimed in. "I'll put on a sweatshirt. And then I've got to water the plants."

MaryAnn, warm in her sweatshirt, turned on the water faucet in the kitchen. Trashbot watched as she filled a little cup and took it into the living room to water a plant, leaving the water running in the kitchen. When she came back to the kitchen to fill the cup again, the little robot, which had now become a water pipe, started clanging and sloshing.

MaryAnn looked down at it. "Come on," she said. "Watering the plants must be good for the environment?"

"It is," was the answer. "But leaving the water running isn't. All that water just runs down the drain. That means we have to get more water from the environment, and we have to clean all the water that goes down the drain. And when it's hot water you waste, that means we had to burn fossil fuels to heat it."

"Which means more air pollution," MaryAnn added, turning off the water.

"You got it," Trashbot agreed.







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MaryAnn quickly finished watering the plants, with the water turned off. Then she grabbed a handful of paper towels to clean up the water she spilled on the counter. And, of course, Trashbot sounded off and spun in circles.

“Okay,” said MaryAnn. “I’ll figure this one out on my own. If I used a sponge instead of all these paper towels, I’d be saving the trees and the energy it takes to make these towels; and I’d be creating less trash that would have to go to the landfill.”

“My, my,” Trashbot said, obviously impressed. “I think you’ve learned quite well.”

“Good,” replied MaryAnn, “because now I’m going to Robin’s house to play.” She walked out of the kitchen, but only got a few steps before Trashbot was wailing like a siren.

“What now?” she asked, sticking her head back into the kitchen.

Trashbot had turned into a giant light bulb and was blinking off and on. “Leaving this light on when you don’t need it is not good for the environment,” it warned.

“Let me guess,” said MaryAnn as she switched off the light. “We burn fossil fuels to make electricity. That means the more electricity we use, the more fossil fuels we burn, and the more pollution we put into the air.”

“Okay,” it blinked off. “You’re on your way to Robin’s.”







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"Thank you," said MaryAnn. "I'll just go ask my brother if he's done with his homework and will drive me."

As MaryAnn headed to her brother's room, she was followed by a little car that was really a trash can honking its horn loudly.

MaryAnn stopped dead in her tracks and waited for Trashbot to explain.

"Cars use gasoline, which is made from oil, which is a fossil fuel," the trash-can-now-turned-car informed her. "Cars and other vehicles create most of our air pollution. Couldn't you get to Robin's house another way?"

"Well, it is only two blocks," MaryAnn admitted. "I could walk or ride my bike."

"You have great ideas!" Trashbot said excitedly. "And while you're at Robin's, maybe you could talk about carpooling to school instead of each of you arriving in separate cars."

MaryAnn sat right down in front of her little trash can/robot. "You mean," she asked thoughtfully, "if I do all these little things, I can help the environment?"

"That's right," Trashbot replied. "If everyone helps a little, the environment will be helped a lot. It's up to each of us."

