

The Plastic Family

“It isn’t pollution that’s harming the environment. It’s the impurities in our air and water that are doing it.” Dan Quayle, former US Vice President

The day the Plastic family moved in next door, I knew I was looking at trouble. I’d been seeing them for some time, generations of them blowing through neighborhoods with ease, taunting people with their cheap and easy ways as if the whole world was their Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Now here they were. I figured I’d better introduce myself at least, try to be friendly.

The door opened at my first knock, and I was looking at a tall drink of water with curves that didn’t quit, though the small number 1 stamped on her face almost stopped me. She said her name was PETE, but that I could also call her PET, or even Polyethylene Terephthalate if I had the tongue for it. A real hormone disrupter if I ever saw one, hers AND mine. I could practically feel my endocrine system looking for an escape hatch. I knew I should back away, but she just smiled, then ever so seductively removed her cap and stuck a plastic straw inside. What could I do? I drank her up, and immediately felt guilty.

“So, how did you like the phthalates?” she asked coyly.

“The what?” I answered dumbly.

“The phthalates,” she repeated, sounding like a cat spitting out a hairball. She was a little less coy this time, either from having to say the word twice, or because of the hairball she had flung into the corner. “Esters of phthalic acid that leach out of the plastic and cause more health problems than ...”

“Stop – you had me at esters,” I said. PETE, or PET, was doing things to my insides that I couldn’t explain by my increased risk of cancer and birth defects alone. My hunger for more must have showed.

“There’s someone I’d like you to meet,” she said, prying my hands off her Aquafina logo.

I did a double take as a hot dish slid around the corner and presented herself to me. Her soft molded contours exuded a simmering sensuality that was easy on the eyes, but warned of danger. Luckily I had brought oven mitts. She smelled intoxicating, with a hint of leftovers she had reheated just for me. I tore off her lid and inhaled deeply, then, unable to control myself, devoured every last bit of what she had to offer. Ashamed of my behavior, I asked her name.

“Polly,” she said. “Polypropylene.” She showed me the number 5 stamped on her bottom that I hadn’t noticed in my hunger to use her for my own selfish needs. “How did you like the BPA?” she asked.

“The what?” I said, beginning to think this Plastic family spoke a language I’d never understand, no matter how many times I heard the health alerts.

“The bisphenol A,” she said.” You know, the stuff that makes me impact resistant, but leaches out to cause brain abnormalities and behavior disorders.”

I must be made of BPA too, I thought, because this had absolutely no impact on me. Maybe my mind was in the gutter with all the plastic trash, or maybe I was too intrigued by the sweet cupcake that was peering at me shyly from a crack in her covering.

The cupcake was dressed in a flimsy green shell that concealed all her charms, but whispered an easy availability. I didn’t wait for an invitation. I tore at her packaging, and her top came off like it was midnight at the Mardi Gras. I licked her clean, then, after she wiped the frosting from my lips, she tossed her cover out the window.

“Hey, isn’t that recyclable?” I asked, feeling as empty as she looked, but trying my best to save the planet.

Sadly, she showed me her number 6 stamp, as if I was supposed to know what that meant. “Excuse me,” she said, “I’m Polly’s sister, Polystyrene, and I can leach the neurotoxins and carcinogens to prove it.”

“Sorry, sister,” I said, trying to brush off the little plastic beads that clung to me tighter than my self-respect. “I don’t have time for any more of your plastic wiles. I have to go.”

“You can’t get away from us that easily,” she smirked. “You haven’t met the rest of the family.” As she said this, a parade of plastic lovelies came out of nowhere, or everywhere to be precise, and approached, all calling my name and pleading, “Take me! Take me!”

“If you don’t leave me alone,” I shouted, backing up to the door, “I’ll call the authorities and have you all recycled.”

A cruel laughter filled the air. “Empty promises,” one of them said, pointing out the window at the mounting trash. “Besides, we recycle ourselves now. We’re in the air you breathe, the water you drink, the food you eat... You see, we recycle in Hell. Your Hell. This is our world now.”

In horror, I suddenly realized that the Plastic family had MY number, and they weren’t about to recycle me either.