

2036

Father: Sit down, son. I've got bad news for you. I'll break it to you slowly. Insects are spreading from the tropics to other parts of the world, killing trees, destroying crops and spreading disease.

Son: Yeah, I've heard about that. It's caused by climate change, which started getting faster a while ago after China pulled out of the Paris accord to fight climate change, causing other countries to pull out too and making the whole thing fall apart.

Father: That's the official version put out by the new government that got elected twenty years ago, but it's only part of the story. China did indeed pull out eighteen years ago, but the United States pulled out a year earlier, claiming that climate change was a hoax invented by the Chinese. Once the evidence that climate change was real grew too strong to be ignored, the new government changed their story, but they still blame China.

Son: Is that the bad news you wanted to tell me? I already knew about the insects.

Father: No, there's worse. One type of mosquito that used to live only in the tropics has spread to Florida. One of them must have bitten me, because now I'm sick with one of the diseases carried by that bug.

Son: Go to the hospital!

Father: Can't. To cure that disease takes at least a week in the hospital, and staying in a hospital costs hundreds of dollars a day. Even if we sold everything we own, we couldn't afford even one day, let alone a week. There used to be a government-run health insurance plan, but so few people bought it that premiums rose sky high and the new government scrapped it. Only those who have private insurance or can pay the costs themselves can get treated in a hospital these days.

Son: Why didn't you buy private insurance?

Father: On what I make shining shoes we can barely afford food, clothing and shelter, and since your mom died, there's nobody else to earn money.

Son: How did she die? You never told me.

Father: You were too young to know about that sort of thing, but now that you're thirteen, I'll tell you what happened. Two years after you were born, she got pregnant again. We could barely afford to raise you, let alone another child; so she decided to get an abortion. But abortions were made illegal nineteen years ago by a five-to-four decision of the Supreme Court, with the new member appointed by the new government casting the deciding vote. We couldn't afford the fees the best illegal abortionists were charging, and the one we went to botched the operation, killing her as well as the baby.

Son: Why didn't you wear a condom?

Father: I wasn't the one who made her pregnant. She was attacked on the street and raped.

Son: Did she report the rapist?

Father: Yes, unlike most women, she did. But he was a rich and powerful white man; so he could afford a top-notch lawyer. We couldn't afford any lawyer; so she had to be represented by a court-appointed district attorney. To make matters worse, she had put on a lot of weight since you were born. It's hard to keep slim when the only food you can afford to buy is starchy junk food. He got off. Black women don't rate highly here any more, especially thick ones.

Son: Seems like lots of things have got worse since the new government was elected. Why has it been in power for twenty years?

Father: Most white folks like our government, especially men and especially those with only a high-school education or less. They don't actually get any benefit from it. Only the richest people do. But they're better off than we black folks are, and that makes it okay.

Son: Aren't there enough black folks and other people who don't like the new government to outvote the ones who do?

Father: Too many of them moved to Canada.

Son: Why didn't you?

Father: When the new government got elected, I had a job that suited a university graduate. I wasn't sure I could get one in Canada, because so many university graduates were moving there that there weren't enough suitable jobs there to go around. A couple of years later I got laid off. I tried to find another job, but all the good ones were filled by white men. Finally I did apply to move there, but by then there were so many Americans in Canada that the Canadian government had already closed the border. I should have applied to move there as soon as the new government was elected, but I guess I wasn't smart enough, and now I'm paying for my mistake.

Son: So did Mom and so am I. If you die, who's gonna look after me?

Father: My sister had the good sense to apply to move to Canada as soon as the new government was elected. If she agrees to take you in, the Canadian government might let her. If not, well, I guess you'll have to quit school and shine shoes like a lot of other black folks are doing these days.