

In 2075, the city of Juleston ran like a mechanical beast, its various Empire State buildings casting throughout the streets, sharp shadows over them below. The city's elite lived in gleaming towers that pierced the toxic fog, while the rest of its citizens, like Alexandra, scrambled to survive in the crumbling Area's below. Alexandra, a 20-year-old college student, lived in Area 7, a place once full of life but now a forgotten corner of the city. The neighborhood was a food desert, where fresh produce was as scarce as clean air, and families relied on synthetic, pre-packaged meals to get by.

Every day after class, Alexandra walked the same cracked sidewalks, her eyes drawn to the towering spires of the rich above her. As a biology major at Juleston University, she studied the latest advancements in agriculture, imagining a world where food could be abundant and accessible. But the harsh reality of her neighborhood felt like a distant echo of those ideals. The rich had everything—the automated drones, vertical farms in the sky; but for Alexandra and her family, it was a daily struggle to find anything real to eat.

Her mom, Spencer, had been the steady anchor in Alexandra's life. Maria was once a vibrant community organizer in Area 7, a woman who had believed in the power of shared resources and collective action. But over the years, as the city expanded and the neighborhood decayed, she had become quieter, more withdrawn. Spencer still worked long hours at a local tech firm, doing data entry for the city's wealthier citizens, but it was a job that barely covered the bills. And as the years had gone on, it had become harder to find the energy to fight for the change that seemed so out of reach.

One evening, after another long day at school, Alexandra returned to the tiny apartment she shared with her mom. The apartment was simple, barely more than a room with cracked walls, but it was home. Spencer was sitting at the small kitchen table, her face tired but warm. She was sorting through old paperwork, bills mostly, her movements slow but steady.

"How was your day, Lex?" Spencer asked without looking up, her voice carrying the soft affection that Alexandra had always known.

Alexandra sighed, setting her bag down on the floor. "Same as always. We learned about aquaphonics in class, but it feels so... disconnected. The stuff we're learning is so forward thinking, but here, we're stuck with protein paste and nutrient pellets."

Spencer's eyes softened as she glanced up at her daughter. "I know. School is important. One day, you'll be the one to change things, you'll see."

Alexandra nodded but didn't feel convinced. She couldn't help but feel the weight of her mother's words, making her fall into defeat. She had always been the dreamer, the one who believed things could be different. But the truth was, nothing seemed to be changing. The city had long since moved on from places like Area 7.

That evening, after dinner, Alexandra jogged through around the block, her mind spinning with the day's lectures and her mother's quiet words. She passed the old community garden at the end of her block, a place once full of life but now abandoned and patchy. Alexandra had seen it every day for years, but something today felt different. There, kneeling among the weeds, was an elderly woman—Mariah, an old gardener who had once tended this garden before Alexandra was a thought.

Mariah looked up as Alexandra approached, offering a warm but weathered smile. "I see you've found me," she said, her voice like pruned, rough but comforting.

"Have you been trying to take care of this place?" Alexandra asked, her voice full of curiosity.

Mariah nodded slowly. "This was once a garden for the whole community. People came together here to grow food, to share. But that was before..."

Alexandra knelt beside her, intrigued by the idea of a garden that had once been shared by everyone. "What happened?" she asked softly.

Mariah looked out at the tangle of weeds, her eyes distant. "The city grew. People moved away. But the land... it's still here. You can still make something of it, if you know how."

That night, as Alexandra walked home, she couldn't stop thinking about what Mariah had said. She had always dreamed of growing something real, something she could share. But until now, she hadn't known where to start.

The next morning, she told her mom about the garden.

Spencer looked skeptical. "Lex, I don't know... We barely have enough to get by. How are we going to start a garden? We don't have the money or the space."

Alexandra's heart beat faster as she tried to explain. "Mom, I met this woman, Mariah. She showed me how to plant a few things in the community garden. It's small, but it could be something. We could start growing our own food, even if it's just a little."

Spencer raised an eyebrow, but her gaze softened. "I don't know, but I'll support you. If this doesn't work out, I can't afford to support an out of reach dream."

The next few weeks became a turning point for both of them. Alexandra spent her evenings at the old garden with Mariah, learning how to prepare the soil, how to grow food with what little they had. She learned that it didn't take much, just the right conditions, a little patience, and a lot of love. It was slow at first, the growth nearly imperceptible, but Alexandra kept returning, checking on the plants every chance she got.

Spencer watched her daughter with quiet pride. Though she was tired from her long hours at work, she couldn't help but be inspired by Alexandra's determination that she encouraged in her.

One day, when she came home from her shift, Alexandra had a small pot of fresh lettuce sitting on the kitchen table.

"Mom," Alexandra said, her voice full of excitement, "I grew this!"

Spencer smiled, a real smile, the first one in days. "I didn't think it was possible, but... you did it. You're really doing it."

The garden, though small, became a symbol of hope in Area 7. Alexandra shared her harvest with the neighbors, and they, in turn, began to plant their own tiny gardens. Spencer helped when she could, offering advice or bringing over scraps of old seeds she'd kept from the past. Together, mother and daughter began to build something real, something that brought the community together in ways that had once seemed impossible.

One evening, as Alexandra sat in their modest living room, staring at the small garden blooming outside her window, Spencer joined her, sitting down beside her daughter.

"You're doing good work, Lex," Spencer said quietly, her voice thick with emotion. "You've changed more than just the garden. You've changed me, too."

Alexandra looked at her mother, surprised by the words. "I didn't mean to change anything. I just wanted to help."

"You've done both," Spencer replied. "You've shown me that there's still life here. We just have to look for it."

As the seasons passed, Area 7 slowly transformed. More gardens sprouted, people began to come together again, not just to survive, but to live. Alexandra knew that her dream was far from over. There was still so much to do, so much to fight for. But for the first time in a long while, she felt like change was possible.

And as she looked at her mom, standing beside her in the garden they had both nurtured, she knew that even in the heart of a food desert, the smallest seed of hope could grow into something extraordinary.