

Enter man, knocks on door, walks away. Enter tall african woman, knocks on door, walks away. Enter both man and woman, knock on door, yell "Fire", sing an aria and recitative from the second act of *Carmen*, spit at each other, and walk away. A moment's pause. Enter man with a bouquet of dead flowers, places them at door, yells "God Save the Queen", waits impatiently. Enter tall african woman, grabs the flowers, eats them, snorts at the man, he snorts back. Silence.

Man grinds his pelvis rhythmically while unrhythmically chanting Sinatra's "I Did It My Way", and throws off all his clothes, revealing a large tattoo, "Mother's Daughter". Meanwhile, tall african woman sings the entire fourth act from *Aida* with a dollar bill in her mouth. She puts the dollar bill in man's g-string but catches her teeth in his waistband.

Door flies open revealing snot-ridden old lady. She puts a dollar bill between her teeth, gets down on all fours, crawls forward, casts a smoldering glance up at man, and plants the dollar bill in the g-string. Man frowns lugubriously at old woman who has also caught her teeth in his waistband.

"Is there no rest," he cries, "uh, excuse me, ma'am, uh, your teeth are rather sharp. Ohhh, ahhh, what are you doing, please stop that, ohhhh, ooooooh, eeeek, you're my mother, you shouldn't be doing such things."

The old lady pulls back with the g-string still in her mouth and nibbles "Your mother?"

"Yes, mother, it's me, your son Pavlo. I've just got out of prison. I murdered father, remember."

"Oh yes, I think his name was John. He was such a good man. It was with a frozen moose leg, wasn't it?"

"Yes mother, but let's not dwell in the past. I'd like you to meet Wamibo, my fiancée. We're here to take the place."

The old woman glares savagely at Pavlo, her nostrils contort and she snorts, flinging mucus in every direction, while bucking helplessly. She disappears through the door. Moments later, she sashays back through the door, composed and carrying a tray of cucumber sandwiches.

"Are you from Gabon?" she asks, but not knowing who really to ask.

"Yes," the tall african woman responds, "I was born there."

"Why, what a coincidence," cries the old woman, "so was I. Of course I had darker skin back then. You'd never know it, would you? Where in Gabon were you born?"

"The capital."

"Well heavens, so was I."

"Mother, you're telling lies. You never lived in Gabon, you never lived in Africa, you were born in Minsk and couldn't get out till after the revolu—oh, pardon me, you were born in Gabon, I was thinking of someone else, so sorry."

The old woman disappears through the door. She returns with a photo album, blows dust off its cover, and opens it with care.

"I'll show you the house I lived in. This is it here."

"Why, what a coincidence," cries the tall african woman, "I've never seen that house before in my life. Why are there no windows?"

"We had no use for chamber pots," says the old woman.

"Oh, how sad," replies the tall african woman while pulling out a wallet of pictures from her purse, and shows off one picture in particular. "We had many windows, hundreds. Oh, there's my brother Wimabo and my sister Womiba. Mind you, mother was always going to the loo. She had a chamber pot in her hands night and day. She cooked with it, she knit with it, she even went to church with it. There were no windows in the church. The vicar was always peeved at mother. She'd receive communion with her chamber pot in her hands. Once the vicar dropped the host in it. Mother said 'Thank-you'."

"We would like the suite now mother, if it's not an inconvenience."

"But son, father's still in the closet and won't be finished for awhile."

"Finished?"

"Decomposing, he should be done in another seven or eight years. Looks quite good, he's come a long way since the day you caught him listening to contraband records. Heavens, what would the authorities have said. It's a good thing you brained him when you did. It's not easy being a member of the Anti-Life League these days. Everyone's so dreadfully happy. In a hurry to move out to the suburbs. Just premature brain death, if you ask me. Speaking of brain death, did you know we had a television once? Your father sold it for a trombone, thought he was Glenn Miller when Miller

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## Runner-up Short Story

Warren Sulatycky

# The Tenants



Andy Phillpotts

*The vicar was always peeved at mother. She'd receive communion with her chamber pot in her hands. Once the vicar dropped the host in it. Mother said 'Thank-you'.*

went missing. Your father still thinks he's Glenn Miller. Of course, they're both dead now. I'm still not sure who's who. If your father's Glenn Miller, or Glenn Miller your father."

The old woman runs back into her apartment and returns with a trombone in hand and plays a swing tune.

"He wanted you to have it, he knew you couldn't play. If you did, he never would have left it. You two were always so competitive. You know, he had a frozen moose leg waiting for you. Always chums, huh? A family that stays together, brains together. The leg made great soup. Of course, I cooked your father's leg, mistook it for the moose's. I put the moose one on your father. Couldn't tell the difference. Now, everything's all green, and the maggots, my heavens, you should see the...would you like to see your father, he's been asking for you."

"Yes, I know," Pavlo replies, "I had a letter from him just the other day asking about the insurance money. We never got the twenty thousand. The insurance men found the rubber hose in the basement behind the gas furnace. Dad was really just a poor little tugboat looking for its harbor. Well mother, goodbye, you're leaving."

His mother runs back into her room, slams

the door and yells "Help, Help. Fire, Rape".

"Mother, don't be difficult. We've been through this scene before and you've always given in. Your shopping cart's underneath the stairwell, just where you left it. Come out mother, and bring dad."

The door edges open, and dad is thrown out. The door closes.

"Ohhh mother, how could you, dad looks terrible, you should have told me, I would have gotten a doctor for him. Mother, for the last time, for your sake, for the sake of all in this building, on this block, come out of the apartment."

The door does not change.

"Alright then, Francis. That's right. I said Francis."

From behind the door comes a muffled "Oh my God!"

Francis, Francuus, Franny. Missuuuus Entropy, cuuumm ouout. Alright then, Mrs. Entropy. I'm forced to inform you that I am not your son, hence, you are not my mother. You never were. You're not even the landlady here. I only pretended I was your son. I know all about the hysterical pregnancy, how the policemen brought me here only temporarily, how you refused to give me back. For God's sake, mother, I was twenty seven years old. You think I didn't know? So you thought you could get away with it, huh,

well forget it lady, I'm onto your act. Plying me with chicken pies and mashed potatoes, with peach cobbler and cherry ice cream. You were too generous. I realized it when it dawned on me you never served me liver and onions. Just once I wanted you to send me to my room without dinner, but no, you sent dad instead. Once you killed mutton our dog for spilling his milk but when I spilt my milk, what did you do, you took the milkman up to your boudoir to show him your statue of Neptune taming sea-horses. You're not subtle, Mrs. Entropy. I'm a grown man now, Mrs. Entropy. Get out of your apartment, Mrs. Entropy. I am now the new landlady of this building."

The door does not change. The man and the tall african woman leave and then return with a funeral bier and a frozen moose leg. Suddenly, the door flies open and the old woman runs out screaming and into the hands of the waiting couple. They toss her onto the bier.

Now, when they had made prayer and flung down barley, Pavlo, the high-hearted son of whomever, standing close up to Mrs. Entropy, struck, and the moose leg chopped its way through the tendons of the neck and unstrung the strength of his surrogate mother. Wamibo raised the outcry. They lifted the cow from the hall of the wide ways, and held her in place, and Pavlo, leader of men, slaughtered her. Now when the black blood had run over the carpet, and the spirit went from the bones, they divided her into parts, and cut out the thigh bones all according to due order, and wrapped them in fat, making a double fold, and laid shreds of flesh upon them. Pavlo burned these on cleft hangers, and poured the gleaming wine over, while Wamibo and the other tenants stood about with forks in their hands. When all had put away their desire for eating and drinking Pavlo and Wamibo took their new apartment.