

GreenHouse
a black comedy in three entropic acts

by Jennie Webb

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GreenHouse

Act I: WASTE

Act II: RUIN

ACT III: MULCH

***all three acts take place in the past, present and future
of the Green House***

CHARACTERS

- MOTHER** The caretaker, is the glue that holds the family together in whatever shape and at whatever cost. Provides.
- FATHER** Comfortably ineffectual, is absent both emotionally and physically much of the time, so is figure-head of the household, only. Waits.
- SON** An inventor, deals in formulas and solutions, seeking only to fix what is perceived as a problem. Builds.
- FIRST DAUGHTER** An avid consumer, her universe—and anything or anyone in it—is limited to how and why it affects her. Uses.
- OTHER DAUGHTER** A self-styled revolutionary, creates a world of martyrdom in which her strength & intelligence are sacrificed to fear, anger & hatred. Fights.
- STEPMOTHER** Conscientious and careful, takes responsibility for herself and her immediate reality but is reluctant to venture beyond it. Delegates.
- OFFICIAL** Played by one actor (M or F), is society, government, the collective, created in our own image. Takes.

"What do you do when the past is no longer a guide to the future?"
Jesse Ausubel, National Academy of Engineers

ACT I. WASTE

The scene opens on the living area of the Green House. There is a feeling of manufactured opulence, of plenty. It is the morning and the breakfast table is, if not center, the focus of the room; the table and chairs are the only pieces of furniture. Son is fiddling with an Invention and consulting books & manuals; Father is reading the newspaper (he may or may not be actually consuming food); Other Daughter is dissecting and examining food, perhaps placing mutilated bits in a knapsack which is never far from her; First Daughter is circling the table, taking bites of things then discarding them, interested only in whatever is new. Mother is serving. (NOTE: Props, furnishing, costumes, etc. are not necessarily "realistic" or what they appear to be.)

MOTHER:
Coffee?

FATHER:
Thank you.

MOTHER:
Milk?

FATHER:
Thank you.

MOTHER:
Sugar?

FATHER:
Honey?

MOTHER:
Fructose?

FATHER:
Sucrose?

MOTHER:
Glucose?

FATHER:
Sugar.

MOTHER:
Sugar?

FATHER:

Thank you.

MOTHER (*to Son*):

And what do you have there, Son? Your Father's trying to read the paper, isn't he? Can you put your toys away?

SON (*re Father*):

Why isn't he at the Office?

MOTHER:

I'm sure I don't know. Father, why aren't you at the Office?

He doesn't respond.

MOTHER:

Father?

FATHER:

Coffee?

SON:

Father?

Father looks at Son.

SON:

Shouldn't you be at the Office?

FATHER:

I suppose you're right. Would it be possible to . . .

MOTHER:

Coffee?

FATHER:

Thank you. (*he looks at Son again*) He's . . .

MOTHER:

The baby. (*to Son*) Isn't that right? Since you were born?

SON (*re Other Daughter*):

She's the baby.

FATHER:

Hmmnmn.

Father goes back to reading his paper. Son returns to fiddling with his Invention. Other Daughter has a scrap of food.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

How long does it take for an animal to decompose? I mean completely; have you ever noticed?

SON:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Casualties of war, for instance. Would the evidence disappear?

MOTHER:

Dear, couldn't this wait until after breakfast?

SON:

Crime victims are sometimes found years later and identified.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

The skeleton gives them away.

SON:

Dental patterns. But eventually teeth and bones erode. The very term "biodegradable" implies "bio," or life. Life ensures biodegradability.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Are bones alive?

MOTHER (*to Son & Other Daughter*):

Bacon? Sausage?

SON:

They're essential to life. They manufacture red blood cells, and in themselves serve as a frame, to structure.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

This house—it is alive.

SON:

What?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*talking to the house now*):

And what about us? Are we something you manufactured? To perform your bodily functions? Perhaps we're nothing but your entrails? Your waste products?

MOTHER:

We haven't had omelets in a long time, have we? A nice Denver Omelet .
. . . Doesn't that sound good?

FATHER:

Is there any. . .

MOTHER (*handing him a piece of toast*):

With or without butter?

FATHER:

Oleo?

MOTHER:

Preserves?

FATHER:

Jam?

MOTHER:

Jelly?

FATHER:

Butter.

MOTHER:

Butter?

FATHER:

Thank You.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

What's he doing here? Shouldn't he be at the Office?

SON:

Father?

MOTHER:

How about a roll? The nice, flaky kind.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Can bones feel pain?

She hits the floor, or throws something.

SON:

There is a sensitive coating on the tips of some bones.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

But you can break bones—right in the middle. That hurts. I've done it.

SON:

Because of the surrounding nerve centers.

OTHER DAUGHTERS:

That's us. We are the nerve centers.

MOTHER:

Homemade biscuits?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

And this house is all that will be left when we are gone. This house will be the identifying remains. And eventually it, too, will biodegrade when it's not alive anymore.

SON:

When we're not alive anymore.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to the house or some outside force*):

I have prepared for my day. I will leave the protection of this structure and come face to face with the forces it shields me from. To combat these powers I make myself strong. Because of them, I nourish myself.

Other Daughter looks for something to eat among the un-appealing scraps of food in or around her knapsack; she notices Son's food.

Is that cereal?

MOTHER:

Hot or cold, dear?

Doorbell rings (or a buzzer or knock on the "door").

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

First Daughter goes to the door, comes back with a box which contains pizza and sits at the table. She notices Father.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Why isn't he at the Office?

She grabs a piece of pizza, may or may not take a bite of it, then sets it down and asks Mother,

Did a package come for me yesterday?

MOTHER:

Oh, yes. Didn't you see it?

Mother points to an enormous box onstage (or a pile of boxes). First Daughter takes another, new, piece of pizza.

FIRST DAUGHTER

It's not like it's my job to monitor the parcel post scheduling around here, for god's sake.

She goes to the box(es), at least one of which is large enough to act as an onstage wardrobe, probably discarding second piece of pizza, and disappears inside the box(es).

Other Daughter has taken a piece of pizza and somehow mutilated it—maybe peeling off the toppings—with a large knife from her knapsack.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I wonder what flesh would look like if you turned it inside out.

MOTHER:

Son, you haven't eaten a thing. Are you feeling well?

SON:

They're judging the projects today.

MOTHER:

Oh, you needn't worry! You always come home with blue ribbons, now don't you?

SON:

Oh, sure . . . Table top fusion, thermodynamic interaction, laser microsurgery . . . Simple stuff. But this year it's different.

MOTHER:

I can see that! *(to Father)* Have you ever seen so many wires? How many different colors are there? I see red, and blue, and yellow . . . What do you suppose the yellow one's for?

SON:

It re-directs the heat rising from the core of the earth into the atmosphere.

MOTHER:

Why, that could come in handy, couldn't it?

SON:

You see, Mother, it's a device that can be manufactured with the tools in any garage and fueled with the supplies in any kitchen. It supplies us with a positive, more efficient alternative to the ozone layer, replacing it through a heat reaction in the stratosphere . . .

MOTHER:

Now why would we want to replace the ozone layer? Remember when your Father worked at the Plant and he was replaced? It took him the **longest** time to find his position at the Office after that. *(to Father)* Am I right, dear?

SON:

But . . .

First Daughter comes from behind box(es), having changed clothes.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

You know what I feel like? Chinese.

Doorbell rings.

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

She goes to the door and returns with a box which contains numerous Chinese food containers in all their packaging glory: packages & foil packets of various sizes which are inside bags, inside other bags, and so forth. She unwraps containers, giving each a cursory glance before discarding it. Other Daughter picks up a pair of chopsticks.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Who was it that tortured prisoners by putting bamboo shoots under the fingernails?

MOTHER:

Who'd like some waffles? When did we last have waffles?

SON:

It was in the Korean War.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Very clever.

MOTHER:

Or pancakes? Do you remember me telling you about the pancakes my Mother used to make me?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Torture hasn't really changed all that much, has it?

MOTHER:

On Sunday mornings, before church.

SON:

The onset of the nuclear age changed the nature of torture completely.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

But it's the same conceptually, I mean.

SON:

With post-nuclear torture entire cultures could be destroyed on a wide scale without the manpower requirements or even the need to monitor the results.

MOTHER:

Buckwheat pancakes, and (to Father) what did she put in them, dear?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Then what is the point? That's not torture.

MOTHER:

Blueberries! And sometimes raspberries. Doesn't that sound delicious?

SON:

The damage is still done. The end result is the same.

FIRST DAUGHTER (*re her clothes*):

Mother, tell me the truth. This is just not my color, is it.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

That's not what it's about.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Nothing ever looks the same as it does in the catalogue.

She returns to the box(es) to change clothes again.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Torture is a **process**.

MOTHER:

Have I ever made banana pancakes?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

Take these chopsticks. With them, for instance, I could eventually get anything I wanted.

SON:

What?

She begins to tap on the Invention, slowly and methodically.

MOTHER:

How about banana **nut** pancakes? That would be a treat, wouldn't it?

Father looks at her with his cup.

MOTHER:

Coffee?

FATHER:

Thank you.

SON:

There's no way you can damage that.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*continuing to tap*):

Okay.

MOTHER:

How many shall I make? (*she counts Father, who doesn't respond*) One, two . . . ?

SON:

It's covered with metal that is harder than anything you can even imagine.

MOTHER (*counting Son*):

Three . . . ?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*continuing to tap*):
Okay.

MOTHER (*counting Other Daughter*):
Four, Five . . . ?

SON (*to Other Daughter*):
It's not working.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*continuing to tap*):
Okay.

SON (*to Other Daughter*):
What are you doing! You're not doing anything!

First Daughter comes back with another outfit on.

FIRST DAUGHTER (*to Mother*):
Are you making pancakes?

MOTHER:
Banana nut; one or two?

SON:
Mother, make her stop!

FIRST DAUGHTER:
We never have french toast any more. I want french toast.

MOTHER:
That's simple enough! Let me see, where did I put the bread?

SON:
She's wrecking it!

OTHER DAUGHTER (*still tapping*):
I thought you said it couldn't be hurt.

SON:
Mother!

MOTHER (*to Other Daughter, who is still tapping*):
Dear, how'd you like to help me by getting the syrup out?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*while tapping*):
I wouldn't, really; I'm kinda' busy.

FIRST DAUGHTER (*to Mother*):

Don't give me any of that berry syrup. I hate that stuff.

First Daughter goes back to the box(es).

SON:

Father . . . !

Father looks up.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Shouldn't you be at the Office?

SON (*breaking down, to Other Daughter*):

Stop it! Please stop it! Just stop it!

She does. Son is still crying. Father looks at him.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Psychology is the operative theme in torture.

Doorbell rings.

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

First Daughter has emerged from the box(es) in a different outfit. She goes to the door; Official enters and approaches Father.

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green, I'm M.E. Swellings from the Department of Surplus Acrylic & Naugahyde, and I have here a requisition for any pre-millennium household furnishings. Our records indicate that you have in your possession several items which fall into this category and they must be surrendered immediately. Please sign here.

Father does, taking a pen out of his pocket which Official confiscates. Going after the table and chairs, Official clears the table with one swipe—Son saves his Invention, Father his coffee cup, Other Daughter the chopsticks—and proceeds to take the table and chairs out of the house.

Mother comes toward Official with a full platter.

