

Advanced English Short Story—The Landlord, Raw and Unforgettable, With Phrasal Verbs for Talking About Power, Housing and Conflict

Level B1-B2

Short Story 1 : By the end of this short story, you will be able to understand the use of PHRASAL VERBS related to POWER, HOUSING AND CONFLICT.

"Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral."

~Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and Philosopher

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

~Desmond Tutu, South African Anglican Bishop



They say bad news comes in threes, but three is just a number, isn't it? For one thing, Nambewe was not a woman given to superstition. Yet the day she saw her landlord arrive with two men, their faces stern and their hands ready to wrestle with anyone who put up a fight, she knew trouble was brewing.

The landlord was bossing the two men around, barking orders that they were quick to carry out.

"Take that pail. And the other pail too. Remove the clothes from the clothes line."

Soon their hands were full. They headed back to the van and returned for more orders, for more of her things.

Nambewe stood still and watched the scene play out in front of her. Her eyes darted between the two men and the van. She felt her throat drying up.

"Gama! Gama!" She called her oldest son.

"He went to play football," her youngest son replied from inside the house.

"Vincent, stay inside the house! Stay inside the house, do you hear me? Don't come out!"

"Why mummy? I want to go outside to play."

"Just do as I say."

The two men were now carrying two big, empty bags. It looked as though they had come to clear out the house. The landlord was giving them more orders and the men were working with clockwork precision.

Nambewe's chest tightened and she opened her mouth wide so some air could go into her lungs. She tied and retied her *chitenje* with trembling hands. The result was messy but she did not care.

"What are you doing?" She finally said.

"What do we look like we are doing?" The landlord snapped and turned back to his men. Everything was disappearing before her eyes: her clothes, her pots, her plates, her spoons, everything she owned! They were packing each and every item they could lay their hands on, and still they wanted more.

"What's happening aNambewe?"

"I don't know," she replied. "I simply don't know. Please help me, God."

"Isn't that your landlord? Eeh, but people. What is he doing now? Where is Vincent's dad?"

"I don't know."

Nambewe rushed to the van and started pulling the items back into the yard. One of the men shoved her to the ground: "Be careful or I'll hurt you."

"aNambewe, just leave them. They will hurt you."

"What's happening aNaphiri? Why is aNambewe lying on the ground?"

"I don't know."

"Mind your business!" The landlord blurted out and advanced towards the entrance of the house.

"Don't worry aNambewe! If he decides to throw you out, I'll take you in. We can put you up for a few nights. What a foolish man!" Naphiri shouted.

Nambewe stood up and followed the landlord. She was not prepared to back down without a fight! The two men ran after her. Naphiri followed suit and tried to block the two men. They pushed her aside and continued their way.

'Vincent, run to the bedroom!'

"Why mum..."

She heard the door open with a bang. Her son screamed and rushed out of the house. "Mummy, there are thieves in the house!"

A small crowd had now gathered in the yard. They watched as the landlord and his men cleared out the house, carting off item after item. They were throwing their weight around and nobody seemed willing to stand up to them.

"Shame on you! Three grown men ganging up on one woman ...do you call that bravery? Where are the mothers who raised you?" Naphiri fired back from a distance. The landlord kept ordering his men about and clearly looked down on the onlookers.

"Please, don't do this! Please," Nambewe sobbed, her hands crossed above her head. "Please."

Her pleas fell on deaf ears. The trio started with the living room: the TV set, the stereo and the carpet. Then they took the fridge and the curtains. For some reason, they left the sofa set. Nambewe begged them not to touch her son's PlayStation.

"Where is it?" The landlord asked. "Where is the PlayStation?"

"Yes, take the PlayStation. We can sell it at a good price," one of the men chimed in.

Vincent went back into the house to retrieve his PlayStation. When he didn't find it, he went after the man who had plans for his PlayStation and started yelling at him: "Where is it? Give me back my PlayStation! Give it back! Give it back!"

The man just pushed him aside like a piece of paper and carried on his destructive spree.

After many interminable minutes, the landlord finally said: "This is what happens when you always fall behind on your rent. Next time, I will kick you out."

The three men drove away, carrying her prized belongings *en toute impunité*.

A few minutes later, Vincent's dad stumbled into the yard, drunk and tittering: "Vincent, let's go and play with your PlayStation!"



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