

Buying a House

by Jennie Webb

a play about money and women and place, in that order

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Buying a House

Characters:

The Clown-like Woman appears as if she could be any age...as long as that age is within sight of 50. Her face is the victim of too much plastic surgery at too early an age, leaving her not at all attractive and eerily unnatural. Perhaps as an attempt to compensate, she has on garish make-up so that she appears almost clown-like. She's the type who might be dressed in a flashy and "exotic" (read: "trashy") outfit, except that she's past her prime and not completely stupid, so she's chosen to go for the "eccentric" (read: "strange") look. She wears unflattering, rose-colored clothing. Her hair is dyed red, and her exaggerated lips are also red, but the colors clash.

The Plain Woman is in her thirties, with nondescript features and very little or no make-up. She is plain, colorless, nearly invisible. Indeed, she appears as if she is trying to become invisible. She may be altogether too real for her own good, and certainly spends a great deal of the time trying to figure out whether everything else is real. She's wearing simple, neutral clothes—a white or off-white skirt or dress and a loose man's sweater which she seems a bit lost in.

The Bland Man hit thirty awhile ago. In fact, although he'd never believe it, at first glance he definitely appears generically "middle-aged." He is bland-looking, but relatively attractive with something about him that tells us he thinks he's quite attractive, or that he used to be. From his manner and dress, we know that he feels he must make an effort in order to be seen.

+ figures appearing only in shadow

Setting: A Room With a Bar

Time: The Very Present

NOTE: It is suggested that creative license be taken in facilitating the heightened technical effects in the final moments of the play, as by that point the tone has already dramatically shifted away from realism.

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We see two women, seated on stools at what is probably a bar in a cocktail lounge. But it could be a counter somewhere else, as long as alcohol is served. There are three stools. The women are sitting in two stools next to each other, facing the audience.

The Clown-like Woman sits at one end and drinks a frothy pink cocktail with an umbrella and lots of fruit.

The Plain Woman sits on the center stool. She's drinking scotch on the rocks.

Both women nurse their drinks. Until,

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

I don't drink.

Pause. The Plain Woman looks anywhere but at the woman beside her. The Clown-like Woman takes a long drink through her long straw.

I mean, I really don't drink.

Pause. The Clown-like Woman breaks out into hideous peals of laughter, and the Plain Woman meets her gaze.

I tell you, I don't drink—but they drove me to it!

The Plain Woman looks to the audience, as if for help.

They're trying to steal my daughter!

The Plain Woman takes a drink of her scotch.

I know that makes me sound like I'm crazy, but it's true. They came into my house, and told me they wanted to take my daughter away from me! Hah!

The Clown-like Woman takes a drink of her frozen concoction.

You know what I told them? You want to know what I said? No! I said no—that's not going to happen! No! Not on your life! My ex-husband and that little know-it-all bitch he married... She didn't even want to have children! You didn't want children? Well you can't have mine!

And then comes that snotty voice of hers, "I know..." she says. She knows...

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN (cont'd):

So why don't you try it, I say to her, with her condescending attitude, always making me look bad, like I'm a bad mother. Why don't you try raising a child from scratch! Then you can tell me you know—what it's like to get your daughter to school every day after you've been up all night.

"She's not getting there on time," they snivel, like it's my fault!

You try getting a 10-year-old girl out of the shower in the morning, I tell them. You try getting up at four o'clock in the morning and finding clean clothes for her to wear. You try buying a lunch for her at the AM/PM on the way to school because you don't have a goddamn refrigerator full of lunchmeat there to serve you!

The Clown-like Woman takes another drink.

So then they say, "Okay!" Like, "Okay!" Like, "Okay, we will!"

Pause.

Over my dead body, I say! Like I'm not a good mother? Like I don't know how to raise my own daughter? I already raised one daughter! All by myself I raised her! Well, except for the year she spent in jail...

The Clown-like Woman empties her drink and begins to choke on a piece of fruit. The Plain Woman moves to help her, and the Clown-like Woman breaks into tears.

Pause. The Plain Woman speaks directly to the audience.

PLAIN WOMAN:

I don't know her. I've never met her before in my life.

She takes a drink.

But this happens to me a lot. Here. I come here a lot. Or I have been. (*short pause*) You probably know that.

Pause.

I'm... I'm buying a house.

Pause.

Hmm. (*short pause*) I'm buying a house! Ha ha. (*short pause*) Ha ha ha ha!!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(rousing) I'm sorry. This isn't like me.

PLAIN WOMAN:

(before she can stop herself) No?

The Clown-like Woman pounces on the Plain Woman, seizing her with both hands.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

NO!!!! I don't drink!

But do you know what this is really about? What it's really about? What is really going on here?

Pause.

(shaking the Plain Woman) DO YOU?!!??

PLAIN WOMAN:

No!!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

CHILD SUPPORT!

PLAIN WOMAN:

Child support?

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Child support! He doesn't want to pay child support! Hah!

She releases the Plain Woman and begins to forage through her large purse, spilling its contents out onto the bar.

Do you have any change?

The Plain Woman starts to retrieve one coin from her own small bag, then surrenders a handful of change to the Clown-like Woman.

They don't know who they're dealing with here! Hah!

The Clown-Like Woman stands, clutching the change as if it's a beating heart.

Hah, hah!

Leaving her belongings on the bar, the Clown-like Woman moves away as a man

enters. He is carrying two drinks: a beer and an old fashioned.

When the Clown-like Woman sees the Bland Man she instantly changes demeanor, moving flirtatiously and smiling in a frightening, wanna-be vixen manner. The Bland Man grins at her as the Clown-like Woman exits. Then he moves to the Plain Woman.

BLAND MAN:

(a simple greeting) Hey!

PLAIN WOMAN:

Hey.

BLAND MAN:

(referring to the Plain Woman's almost empty drink) You ready?

PLAIN WOMAN:

Thanks.

The Bland Man sets down the old fashioned.

BLAND MAN:

It's a double.

PLAIN WOMAN:

Thanks.

BLAND MAN:

(shrugging it off) Hey!

He sits, and drinks from his beer bottle. The Plain Woman drinks. Until,

PLAIN WOMAN:

What are you doing here?

BLAND MAN:

Hey! What do you mean, what am I doing here?

PLAIN WOMAN:

I mean, what are—

BLAND MAN:

(interrupting) Hey! I knew you'd be here, today's the day, right? It's today, right? So...

Pause.

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PLAIN WOMAN:
So?

BLAND MAN:
(as a defense) Hey!

The Plain Woman empties her drink, and looks to order another before she remembers the new old fashioned. The Bland Man is finishing his beer.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Thank you but... It's my house.

BLAND MAN:
Heh heh heh.

PLAIN WOMAN:
It's my house!

BLAND MAN:
(a surrender) Hey! I know! It's your house!

PLAIN WOMAN:
It's my house, and it's my day—

BLAND MAN:
(interrupting, pointing to the old fashioned) And that's your drink. But if you don't want it—

PLAIN WOMAN:
(interrupting, pushing it toward him) I don't want it!

As the Bland Man reaches for the old fashioned she reconsiders, putting her hand over the drink.

But if you insist...

The Bland Man grins.

BLAND MAN:
I insist.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Thanks.

The Plain Woman drinks.

BLAND MAN:
So, what's the deal?

PLAIN WOMAN:
What's the deal?

BLAND MAN:
Yeah, what's the deal? Do they come here, or do you go there, or what?

PLAIN WOMAN:
Not that you have any business knowing, but the deal is that they come here and we go there.

BLAND MAN:
What do you mean, not that I have any business knowing?

PLAIN WOMAN:
You don't have any business knowing, that's what I mean. It's my deal and it's none of your business.

BLAND MAN:
(an appeal) Heeeeyyyyyyyyy.

PLAIN WOMAN:
It isn't! It's mine!

BLAND MAN:
I know! Don't you think I know?

PLAIN WOMAN:
(a challenge) What?

BLAND MAN:
What?

PLAIN WOMAN:
What do you know?

BLAND MAN:
Hey! I know that it's your business, it's your deal and it's your fucking house!
(short pause) I need a beer.

The Bland Man exits just as the Clown-like Woman re-enters, carrying a new pink drink. Not noticing her, the Plain Woman speaks again to the audience.

PLAIN WOMAN:
It's true. It's mine, all mine. It's mine and mine alone.

PLAIN WOMAN (cont'd):

My income, my bills, my checking account, my withholdings, my direct deposits, my FICO score, my entire credit history including that closed IKEA account when I was 27 because of someone's inability to do what he was supposed to have done, my decision to live in a "transitional neighborhood" where I'll have to believe I'm safe even though there's that lingering feeling of "what if" and "could they" and "should I" but what kind of idiot would I be if I thought that would go away with him around, anyhow?

It's my down payment, my empty money-market, my life's savings, my having to deal with my parents because, yes, I really want to do this now and thank you very much and I love you too and, yes, it'll take everything my grandmother left me and, no, I don't think I'd be better off waiting just five more years just in case.

It's my mortgage calculated, and it's my having to stay at my ridiculous job which is getting more and more absurd as each day goes by, more and more like a financial jail sentence with no sight of a reprieve, more and more like a sick joke I don't even want to get... But it's okay!

Because it's mine.

Silence. The Plain Woman relishes her scotch. Until,

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

They made me re-finance.

Startled, the Plain Woman nearly spills her drink.

Did I tell you that? They made me re-finance so they could buy *their* house! Their home with a view. Their grand hillside retreat with the balconies off every room where the first thing they did is take the child-locks off of the cabinets! Because they don't have children, you see! No! No babies in their house! Not one!

Noo-hoo! You want to know about children, you'd have to ask me! And do you think they'd do that? Ask about sacrifices to raise them? About child-proofing? About protection? How it's never enough? How nothing's ever enough! Never! How you've wasted your whole life and no one even notices! And how you're turning it all around now and no one pays attention! No one even looks at you!

The Clown-like Woman breaks into tears and throws herself onto the bar.

PLAIN WOMAN:

(returning to the audience) Right.

The Plain Woman takes a drink.

PLAIN WOMAN:

I've been through it all. Right here. Realtors. Multiples. FiSBOs.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(mumbling) Just what do they expect me to do?

PLAIN WOMAN:

Inspections.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

I'm already working 90 hours a week!

PLAIN LIKE WOMAN

Appraisals.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

The inheritance went right through my fingers!

PLAIN WOMAN:

The brokers and the lenders and the impounds and the PMI.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

He knew I already took out a second!

PLAIN WOMAN:

Interest rates, amortized...

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Now where am I supposed to go?

PLAIN WOMAN:

And the balloon payment!

CLOWN LIKE WOMAN:

I'm upside down! No one will touch me!

PLAIN WOMAN:

(toasting, with a single-malt pluckiness) I AM BUYING A HOUSE!!!

THE CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(a plaintive wail) Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!!!

The Bland Man re-appears with a beer, an old fashioned and a frozen drink. He plunks the old fashioned in front of the Plain Woman. Then,

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BLAND MAN:

(leaning down, to the Clown-like Woman) Heeeeeeeey.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(sitting up, suddenly composed) Hiiiiiiii!

BLAND MAN:

I've got something for youuuuuuu.

He slides the frozen drink in front of her.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(a schoolgirl gasp) Aaaaooooooooohhhhh!

The Clown-like Woman pushes away the still quite-full drink she's got, and embraces this new one. She takes out the umbrella and puts it in her hair.

(tittering) Tee hee heeee!

The Bland Man grins. The Clown-like Woman takes a piece of fruit out of the drink and puts it into her mouth. And takes it out again.

But I don't drink!

Both the Clown-like Woman and the Bland Man erupt into raucous laughter. The Plain Woman looks to the audience.

BLAND MAN:

And I've got something else, too!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

You doooooo? For meeeee?

BLAND MAN:

Uh Huuuuuh!

The Bland Man reaches into his front trouser pocket in an almost grotesque gesture—and stays there a moment too long—before pulling out a hand filled with change. He spills the coins on the bar in front of the Clown-like Woman.

Pause.

BLAND MAN:

Your change. You left it at the telephone.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Oooooooooohhhh! That's sooooooo...

The Clown-like Woman breaks into tears again. The Bland Man returns to his seat on the other side of the Plain Woman.

BLAND MAN:

(reacting to a look from the Plain Woman) What?

PLAIN WOMAN:

Unbelievable.

BLAND MAN:

What?

PLAIN WOMAN:

Tell me something. How did we meet?

BLAND MAN:

What?

PLAIN WOMAN:

How did we first meet?

Pause.

Never mind.

BLAND MAN:

Never mind?

PLAIN WOMAN:

Never mind.

BLAND MAN:

What's... Okay then! I was just giving the woman her change back. What's the great crime against nature?

PLAIN WOMAN:

(indicating the change) It's mine.

BLAND MAN:

What?

PLAIN WOMAN:

It's my... Never mind.