

# ***Remodeling Plans***

a domestic comedy built around significant changes

**by Jennie Webb**

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CHARACTERS, all of whom are into their 30s/40s if not beyond:

**THE HOMEOWNER**, first heard as WOMAN'S VOICE, lives life very carefully, at her own pace and by the rules. Mostly someone else's. She's very good at making do, waiting for just the right thing. And until she gets it—and in case she never does—she's used to saying everything's fine and convincing herself that it is. She also has a hard time opening up, keeping up, or making a move when it comes to people, places, or things. So a lot passes her by.

**THE FIRST FRIEND**, first heard as ANOTHER WOMAN'S VOICE, is definitely the kind of woman you'd want at a party, unless it's a Church function. Or if there are going to be kids there. Or if you want anyone else at the party to get any attention.

**THE CONTRACTOR**, first heard as MAN'S VOICE, is a surprisingly stylish man who has over-sized ideas.

**THE FRIEND WHO KNOWS** prides herself on being able to put ideas into action. Her own ideas, especially. And if they're not hers, there's always room for improvement so she appropriates them, along with the people who had them.

**THE WIDE-EYED WOMAN** is pretty much constantly amazed. At the beauty, excitement, wonder, and injustice of it all. It inspires her, reminds her of her place in life, and sometimes even pisses her off. Although she'd never admit it.

**THE HUSBAND**, first heard as DEEP MALE VOICE, is quite literally all man, and because he takes up so much space he ultimately loses himself in the role.

**THE MOTHER** is really very entertaining, unless she happens to be your mother.

**THE HUSBAND, TOO**, played by the same actor who plays the contractor, seems like he is large enough to reasonably communicate and function in reality.

**THE GUY**, played by the same actor who plays the husband, is maybe just a guy, maybe more.

and **THE CHILD'S VOICE**, heard on the answering machine.

SETTING:

A kitchen in flux.

—structured in 9 scenes, the full-length play takes place in the present day over the course of one calendar year; an intermission is suggested after scene 7—

**Scene 8—January**

*The lights come up very slowly to reveal an impressive kitchen moving towards completion, now suddenly large enough for the over-sized appliances. They're nestled in appropriately over-sized cabinetry and the old refrigerator is gone. The floor has been repaired.*

*As the music fades, we maybe hear a rooster crowing and birds chirping. The homeowner comes through the door wearing a heavy bathrobe. She carries a pitcher of water and, keeping an eye on all that surrounds her, moves toward a small coffee maker. She hesitates, then quickly fills it and returns her attention to the room.*

*After a moment, she addresses the kitchen. In particular, the appliances in it.*

HOMEOWNER:

So. What are you looking at?

*Long Pause.*

You all think you're really something, don't you? With your switches and levers and digitally backed-up timers. Your mysterious purposes and hidden recesses. You arrived ... and suddenly the entire household revolves around you. On your schedule, to your proportions, in your alternate color schemes. And you figure you've completely out-smarted me because your manuals are gone and I don't stand a chance of negotiating your ... plentiful options.

Yet I'm still here, aren't I? Muddling by with my plodding pilgrim ways, my good friend "Mr. Coffee" gurgling away in the background. Why? Because there's nothing you can even begin to do—no service you can render, no operation you can perform—without the cue from one of us. As a matter of fact, there's not a single soul among you who's actually fully functioning!

How does it feel to be stuck, unable to move, trapped in a place you don't belong and not able to do a damn thing about it?

*Opening the new refrigerator, she's blinded by an intense, other-worldly light. She grabs a bag of coffee beans and slams the door shut.*

*The refrigerator emits what sounds like a rather satisfied hum.*

Fine. Just watch you don't get too comfortable. I'm not going anywhere, and might decide one day to take things into my own hands. Get a little sloppy with some H<sup>2</sup>O in here, spill a bit of liquid where it doesn't belong, the entire room short circuits and ... Poof!

It could happen, you know. And everything would change. Just ... like ... that.

*Suddenly her mother pops up, hidden in a heavily cushioned banquette seating area.*

MOTHER:

Who are you talking to?

HOMEOWNER:

Mother!

MOTHER:

So! You're finally up! You're making coffee? You keep forgetting to buy de-caf. I put it on the list, but you never get it. You should take me to the stores with you, is what you should do.

HOMEOWNER:

How long have you been—? Never mind.

MOTHER:

Never mind?

HOMEOWNER:

Never mind. I'm making coffee. Do you want some coffee?

MOTHER:

I can't drink coffee with caffeine. Your father used to drink coffee with caffeine but I could never drink coffee with caffeine. Even before they made de-caffeinated coffee. I used to drink Sanka. I still like Sanka. You could buy Sanka, couldn't you?

HOMEOWNER:

You want me to buy Sanka?

MOTHER:

Well, if it's just for me I don't see why you should. I drink Sanka but I don't need Sanka. How come these cushions here are so thick? These are very thick cushions. You kind of sink into these cushions. I feel like I'm getting lost all the time in these cushions.

HOMEOWNER:

That'd be a shame.

MOTHER:

It would be a nightmare, is what it would be. Can you imagine, me sinking down, forever and ever into these cushions and never coming out?

*The homeowner grinds coffee beans.*

That bed is too thick, too. I can't sleep on that bed. It's too thick. It's like there's a mattress and another mattress on top of it. It's too thick, and it's too high. I have to use a chair to climb into the bed at night, it's so high.

HOMEOWNER:

We'll get you a different one.

MOTHER:

No. Don't worry about me. But I like firm beds. I'm surprised you don't remember I like firm beds. You always had firm beds growing up. All the beds in our house were firm. It was a house full of firm beds.

HOMEOWNER:

I hate firm beds.

MOTHER:

You hate firm beds? I never knew you hated firm beds! We always had firm beds!

HOMEOWNER:

I like soft beds.

MOTHER:

I can't imagine liking soft beds.

HOMEOWNER:

And I like caffeinated coffee.

*The husband comes through the door, dressed for work.*

HUSBAND:

So how are my girls this morning?

MOTHER:

I didn't sleep well. My, you look rested!

HUSBAND:

I feel rested!

HOMEOWNER:

I'm making coffee.

HUSBAND:

De-caf?

*Pause.*

HOMEOWNER:

No.

HUSBAND:

*(shaking his head)* Thanks, then.

MOTHER:

It's very cold in here. Why do you keep the house so cold? I can't get warm. I just can't.

HOMEOWNER:

Toast?

MOTHER:

Are you using the toaster?

HOMEOWNER:

Yes. To make toast, I'm using the toaster.

MOTHER:

I thought maybe you were using the oven.

HOMEOWNER:

We don't have gas.

MOTHER:

No gas? That's why it's like an ice-box in here! I've been living in an unheated house?

HUSBAND:

Is the paper here yet?

HOMEOWNER:

I guess.

MOTHER:

How long is it you've been without heat?

HOMEOWNER:

No, we have heat.

HUSBAND:

Where is it, then?

HOMEOWNER:

Outside?

MOTHER:

But not in the kitchen?

HOMEOWNER:

No, there's *heat* in the kitchen, just not—

HUSBAND:

*(interrupting)* You haven't brought it in, is what you meant.

HOMEOWNER:

What?

MOTHER:

I don't understand why the heat works in every room but not the kitchen.

HOMEOWNER:

No ...

HUSBAND:

Yes. I'll go get it. That's okay, sweetie.

*The husband leaves, out front through the house.*

MOTHER:

Do you just use the oven to heat the kitchen? Is that what you mean?

HOMEOWNER:

What?

MOTHER:

Because that's how people die. Whole families. I read recently about a whole family that was killed that way by the father.

HOMEOWNER:

What are you talking about?

MOTHER:

Fathers who sacrifice their whole families because they're too proud to admit that they need help. If only he had gone to someone, said "I need help," young lives would not have been lost.

HOMEOWNER:

Mother ...

MOTHER:

He didn't die, though. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, I believe he's facing murder charges! How do you like that?

HOMEOWNER:

Mother. That was a barbeque or something.

MOTHER:

Well, whatever it was, all I can imagine is those cold little children ...

HOMEOWNER:

Mother ...

MOTHER:

Gone because their maniac of a felon father was too proud to ask for help.

HOMEOWNER:

We have heat. In every room.

MOTHER:

Then why don't you turn it on? It's like an ice-box in this house!

*The sound of a door slamming.*

HOMEOWNER:

We do turn it on. It is on.

*The husband hurries back in from the house carrying the paper.*

HUSBAND:

Brrrrrr. What's on?

HOMEOWNER:

The heat.

MOTHER:

She says she turns it on, but to me it's like an ice-box in here! I know I'm old and ridiculous, but I just can't get warm!

HUSBAND:

Oh, you're not ridiculous.

MOTHER:

I am! I'm ridiculous!

HUSBAND:

Not in the least!

HOMEOWNER:

Sweetheart, don't argue.

HUSBAND:

Tell you what. It is nippy out there. Let me turn the thermostat up. See if that helps.

*He leaves through the door.*

MOTHER:

Goodness! If I'd known you had heat, I would have asked him a long time ago!  
That's a wonderful man. He wouldn't be too proud to ask.

HOMEOWNER:

So you don't want toast?

MOTHER:

Only if you make it in the oven.

HOMEOWNER:

We don't have— I'm making it in the toaster.

MOTHER:

No. Thanks.

HOMEOWNER:

Okay.

*She puts one slice in the toaster, then hesitates.*

*(shouting offstage)* Do you want toast?

HUSBAND:

*(offstage)* What?

HOMEOWNER:

Toast!

*The husband comes back in.*

HUSBAND:

What do you need?

HOMEOWNER:

I don't *need*— I'm asking you whether you'd like toast.

HUSBAND:

Are there any English muffins?

HOMEOWNER:

I don't know.

MOTHER:

Did you turn the heat up?

HUSBAND:

I certainly did! Can't have you getting a chill and coming down with some bug, now can we?

HOMEOWNER:

God forbid.

MOTHER:

You know, I feel toasty already!

HOMEOWNER:

Okay. Announcement! I'm making myself a piece of Sourdough toast. I don't think we have any English muffins, but anyone is welcome to look for themselves. If so, I will be happy to insert one—or more—into the toaster. Not the oven, but the toaster. Because that's the way we do it in this house. So. One slice of Sourdough bread. Here it goes. Into the toaster. Where it will become toast. Anyone else for Sourdough toast? No? Last call? One? Two? I'm pressing the lever. Three?

*Pause.*

HUSBAND:

I really should be getting to the office.

*He gives the homeowner a peck on the cheek and moves to the edge of the stage.*

Oh, she'll be calling you about the carpenters. They're supposed to finish off this doorway by the end of the week. They'll need a check—you'll be here this afternoon?

HOMEOWNER:

Where else would I be?

HUSBAND:

Right. Bye!

*He heads out through the house.*

MOTHER:

My. What a catch you've got there. The son I never had.

*The sound of a door slamming.*

HOMEOWNER:

Right.

MOTHER:

Can you feel the heat yet?

*The homeowner watches the toaster.*

MOTHER:

They don't make toasters like they used to, you know. They don't make toasters that really toast. (*short pause*) That's why I mentioned the oven.

HOMEOWNER:

Mother ...

MOTHER:

But I don't want you to go out of your way.

HOMEOWNER:

No, I would gladly use the oven to make a perfect piece of toast, especially for you ...

MOTHER:

I'm sorry I said anything. I didn't know you felt this way about ovens.

HOMEOWNER:

But it is not possible. It cannot be done because there is no gas in the— The oven does not work.

MOTHER:

What about the broiler?

HOMEOWNER:

The whole kitchen. No appliance works that requires gas.

MOTHER:

But the refrigerator works ...

HOMEOWNER:

The refrigerator doesn't need gas.

MOTHER:

And there's the little oven ...

HOMEOWNER:

The little oven?

MOTHER:

The one I make my toasted cheese sandwiches in.

HOMEOWNER:

The toaster oven. That's electric. You want me to make toast in that?

MOTHER:

No. I'm not hungry.

*Pause.*

HOMEOWNER:

All right then. You're okay?

MOTHER:

Oh, yes. Fine.

*The mother smiles beatifically. The homeowner pours herself a cup of coffee.*

But if you'd get heat, I might be able to sleep on that mattress.

*Black out.*

*The extended sounds onstage give the feeling of growth, of stretching, of effort, even of birthing. If they are scored by the cheerful music from the previous scene, it now becomes overburdened, discordant.*