

Buying a House
a play about money and women and place, in that order
by Jennie Webb

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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. Added to that is make-up that makes her appear almost clown-like. While she once might have been dressed in a flashy and “exotic” (read: “trashy”) outfit, now she’s past her prime and not completely stupid, so she’s chosen to go for the “eccentric” (read: “strange”) look. 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 and a man’s oversized cardigan 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 on the West Coast of the U.S.**

Time: **The Present Which Connects to the Past**

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 any sort of realism.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Buying a House

We see two women, seated on stools at what is probably a bar in a cocktail lounge. It's dark, with lighting and an ambiance that's rose-colored, but not in a particularly healthy way. In the background, we can barely hear the sound of change clinking—or is it glasses clinking?—and voices.

There are three stools. The women are sitting in two stools next to each other, facing the audience.

The Clown-like Woman, wearing unflattering magenta clothing and garish make-up, sits at one end and drinks a frozen pink cocktail with an umbrella and lots of fruit.

The Plain Woman sits on the center stool. She's wearing a white or off-white skirt or dress under a large, loose cardigan which is probably beige. She's drinking scotch on the rocks.

Both women nurse their drinks. Until,

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(to the Plain Woman) I don't drink.

The Plain Woman looks anywhere but at the woman beside her. The Clown-like Woman takes a long drink through her long straw and tries again to engage the Plain Woman.

I mean, I really don't drink.

The Clown-like Woman now lets out a hideous peal of laughter, and the Plain Woman is drawn into meeting her gaze.

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

The Plain Woman looks to the audience.

They are trying to steal my daughter. I know that makes me sound like I'm crazy, but it's true. My ex-husband and that know-it-all little bitch he married... they came into my house, and told me they wanted to take my daughter away from me. The only thing I have of value in the world. That's mine, free and clear!

"Weeeelll... we're concerned that she's not getting to school on time," she says, in that snotty voice of hers. "Now, I knowww..." she says. She knows... with her condescending attitude. What does she know? She didn't even want to have children!

The Plain Woman drinks.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

But I go ahead, and I say, so why don't you try it? Why don't you try getting her to school every day. You try waking up at four o'clock in the morning to find clean clothes for her to wear. You try buying 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!

Another quick sip for fortification.

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? She has no idea all I've put into that kid, what a giver I am. What does she know what it's like to raise a child from scratch?

The Clown-like Woman dives into her pink drink and begins to choke on a piece of fruit. The Plain Woman instinctively moves to help her and the Clown-like Woman breaks into tears and throws herself into the Plain Woman's arms. Then,

PLAIN WOMAN:

(to the audience) I don't know her. I've never met her before in my life. But this happens to me a lot. Here. Stories of bad breaks. Lots of short ends of lots of sticks. Losses and rip offs and sure things that weren't. I've been coming here a lot, lately. Coming back here, I mean. I'm... I'm... I'm buying a house.

Her tentative words hang there, and then she starts to try them on again.

I'm—

She's interrupted by a loud sound of change, as if it's spilling from a slot machine or in an arcade, and perhaps voices laughing.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

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

PLAIN WOMAN:

(before she can stop herself) No?

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

No! I don't drink!

The Plain Woman looks again at the audience.

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

She begins to forage through her large purse, emptying some of its contents 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.

The Clown-like Woman stands, clutching the change.

Hah!

Leaving her belongings on the bar, she moves away as the Bland Man enters. He carries two drinks: a beer and an old fashioned.

The Clown-like Woman changes demeanor as she passes him, moving flirtatiously and smiling as she exits. The Bland Man grins at her and moves to the Plain Woman, who is surprised to see him.

BLAND MAN:

Hey!

PLAIN WOMAN:

Hi.

BLAND MAN:

(referring to the Plain Woman's almost empty drink) You ready? It's a double.

He sets down the old fashioned.

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) I knew you'd be here. You told me you've been coming here and today's the day. It's today, right? So...

PLAIN WOMAN:

So?

BLAND MAN:

Hey!

He drinks his beer. The Plain Woman empties her drink, then considers the new old fashioned.

PLAIN WOMAN:

Thank you, but... It's my house.

BLAND MAN:

Heh heh heh.

PLAIN WOMAN:

It is.

BLAND MAN:

Hey! I know! And that's your drink. But if you don't want it...

Pause.

PLAIN WOMAN:

Thanks.

She drinks.

BLAND MAN:

So, then. 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 I'm not asking you for anything and you don't need to worry about anything and it's none of your business.

BLAND MAN:

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! I need a beer.

He exits and 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.

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?

PLAIN WOMAN:

It's my down payment, my empty money-market, my life 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 ridiculous 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 this is finally it, and it is going to be okay!

Holding her scotch too tightly, she lifts in front of her. Perhaps she looks in it for something that's not there.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(to the Plain 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! 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! How you give and give and give and then at one point, one even looks at you?! No one even notices you're there?

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

PLAIN WOMAN:

(returning to the audience) Right. 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 single-malt fortification) Because I am buying a house!!!

THE CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(a plaintive wail) Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!!!

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

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 pink drink in front of her.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(a schoolgirl gasp) Aaaaooooohhhhh!

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.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Hee hee hee!

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:

Ohhh! And I've got something else, too!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

You dooooooo? For meeeee?

BLAND MAN:

Uh HUUUUUUH!

He reaches his hands into his front trouser pocket—and keeps it there a moment too long—before pulling out his hand filled with change. He spills the coins on the bar in front of the Clown-like Woman.

Your change. You left it at the pay phone.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Oooooooohhhhh! That's sooooooo...

Tears again consume the Clown-like Woman. The Bland Man returns to his seat on the other side of the Plain Woman.

BLAND MAN:

(re a look from the Plain Woman) What?

PLAIN WOMAN:

I thought they got rid of the pay phone.

BLAND MAN:

No. It's still there.

PLAIN WOMAN:

Really? Who still uses a pay phone?

BLAND MAN:

(pointing to the Clown-like Woman) She does! *(re another look from the Plain Woman)* What?

PLAN WOMAN:
Never mind.

BLAND MAN:
Never mind?

PLAIN WOMAN:
Never mind.

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

PLAIN WOMAN:
It's mine.

BLAND MAN:
What?

PLAIN WOMAN:
It's my change.

BLAND MAN:
What?

PLAIN WOMAN:
It's my— Never mind.

Both the Plain Woman and Bland Man slug back their drinks. Still sobbing, the Clown-like Woman claws at the pile of change. Then,

They made her re-finance.

BLAND MAN:
Oh.

They both return to their drinks. We hear laughter in the background.

It's good to be back here. It's great seeing you.

Pause.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Thanks.

BLAND MAN:
So. When are they coming?

PLAIN WOMAN:

In... any minute. They'll be here any minute.

BLAND MAN:

Any minute. Hey! Any minute!

PLAIN WOMAN:

Yes.

BLAND MAN:

Hey!

PLAIN WOMAN:

You sound like you don't believe me.

BLAND MAN:

Like I don't believe you?

PLAIN WOMAN:

Yes. Like you don't believe me. Like I'm making it up.

BLAND MAN:

Why wouldn't I believe you?

PLAIN WOMAN:

I don't know why you wouldn't believe me.

BLAND MAN:

Why would you make it up?

PLAIN WOMAN:

I'm *not* making it up!

BLAND MAN:

Heyyyy.

PLAIN WOMAN:

They're coming and I'm—!

BLAND MAN:

(interrupting) I know! I know! You're—

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(interrupting, fully recovered from her dramatics) You're buying a house?

BLAND MAN:

Yeah!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(doe-eyed, to the Bland Man) I remember my first time.

BLAND MAN:

Heh heh heh.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

My first time... What am I talking about? There was only one time. *(to the Plain Woman)* My first and only time! *(to the couple)* I'll never forget it. And neither should you!

PLAIN WOMAN:

(attempting to clear up the Clown-like Woman's misconception) Oh. No.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

(agreeing with the Plain Woman for the wrong reasons) No!

BLAND MAN:

(playing along, enjoying himself) No!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

It can be a wonderful experience. If you've got the right man.

PLAIN WOMAN:

No...

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Yes!

BLAND MAN:

Yeah!

PLAIN WOMAN:

No! It's only me. I'm the one.

BLAND MAN:

Yeah, baby, you're the one!

PLAIN WOMAN:

No!

BLAND MAN:

Yeah!

PLAIN WOMAN:

No!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN::

Yes!

PLAIN WOMAN:

No! I'm saying it's mine. My house. My money. Mine, mine, mine!

Silence. The Clown-like Woman appears as if she's been slapped in the face.

I'm sorry.

The Clown-like Woman exits.

BLAND MAN:

Why in the hell did you have to do something like that!

PLAIN WOMAN:

I'm sorry!

The Bland Man exits.

(after him) I'm...! No, I'm not.

She looks to the audience.

Why should I be sorry? I hate this. I'm not going to do this. I have nothing to be sorry about. I've done nothing to be sorry for!

She kills her latest scotch and sets the glass down with great force. She checks to see if the glass is broken.

The Clown-like Woman returns. She reaches out and grabs the pile of change.

PLAIN WOMAN:

(pointing to the change) Hang on, that's—

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

I have to make another call!!

She exits.

We again hear the sound of change clinking in the background. The Plain Woman tries in vain to extract some scotch from any of her glasses. The Bland Man returns with a beer and an old fashioned.

BLAND MAN:

Hey.

The Plain Woman grabs the old fashioned.

BLAND MAN:
Hey!

PLAIN WOMAN:
(under her breath) I hate it when you say that.

BLAND MAN:
What?

PLAIN WOMAN:
Never... Thanks.

BLAND MAN:
Hey.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Yeeah! *(holding up her drink)* Only two?

When he doesn't respond, she points to the Clown-like Woman's pink drinks.

BLAND MAN:
Oh. She doesn't drink.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Of course not!

The Plain Woman drinks.

BLAND MAN:
She's okay.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Huh?

BLAND MAN:
I just thought you'd want to know.

PLAIN WOMAN:
That *she's* ohhhh kayyyy?

BLAND MAN:
Yeah. She's... I mean, I gave her the number of my money guy.

PLAIN WOMAN:
You did what?

BLAND MAN:

For re-financing her house. I gave her the number of my money guy.

PLAIN WOMAN:

Your money guy?

BLAND MAN:

My money guy.

PLAIN WOMAN:

You have a money guy?

BLAND MAN:

Yeah, I have a money guy.

PLAIN WOMAN:

How can you have a money guy?

BLAND MAN:

What do you mean, how can I have a money guy?

PLAIN WOMAN:

How can you have a money guy? You don't have any money.

BLAND MAN:

I have money.

PLAIN WOMAN:

No, you don't. How can you say that?

BLAND MAN:

What do you mean? I have money and I have a money guy!

PLAIN WOMAN:

You can't have a money guy, you don't have— !

BLAND MAN:

(interrupting) I have money! How can you say I don't have money! I have money!
You don't know! You think you know every damn thing, but you don't! I have money!
I have plenty of money!! I—!

PLAIN WOMAN:

(interrupting) Okay! Okay! Okay!

The Bland Man drinks.

I'm sorry.

BLAND MAN:
Hey...

Softened by scotch, the Plain Woman looks to the audience for permission to smile.

Besides...

PLAIN WOMAN:
Yes?

BLAND MAN:
You don't need money to have a money guy. It doesn't work that way.

PLAIN WOMAN:
Right. I did not know that.

The Bland Man sits and moves close to the Plain Woman.

BLAND MAN:
So!

The Plain Woman relaxes against the Bland Man.

PLAIN WOMAN:
So.

BLAND MAN:
This feels comfortable, huh? You. Me. Here, again. Our place?

PLAIN WOMAN:
It... yeah. It does.

BLAND MAN:
Yeah!

They drink.

So about this house...

The Plain Woman sits upright.

PLAIN WOMAN:
About *my* house?

BLAND MAN:
Yeah, about *your* house.

PLAIN WOMAN:
What about it?

BLAND MAN:
Well, here's the thing...

PLAIN WOMAN:
The thing?

BLAND MAN:
The thing is this: I know we talked about it...

PLAIN WOMAN:
Yes, we did. We talked a lot.

BLAND MAN:
And here's the thing. I've been thinking...

PLAIN WOMAN:
You have?

BLAND MAN:
Yeah. I've— I've been thinking that maybe...

PLAIN WOMAN:
Maybe?

BLAND MAN:
Yeah! Maybe—

PLAIN WOMAN:
(interrupting) No.

BLAND MAN:
Hey!

PLAIN WOMAN:
No. No maybes. Not anymore. I don't do maybes anymore. Not with you, not with anyone.

BLAND MAN:
H—

PLAIN WOMAN:

(interrupting) And no more heys! No more yeahs and whats? and furniture that I hate and books I'd never in a million years read and meat in the freezer and beer in the fridge and phone bills with calls that I don't know about, to people that I don't know about, about times I don't know about. No more. Not anymore. Not any of it!

Silence.

BLAND MAN:

Aren't you and your cozy self going to have a fine time.

He stands.

Whatever. I was just trying. That's all anyone can do. Is try. Huh? Call me for the housewarming!

He turns away, then

And hey! The drinks are on me!

The Bland Man exits.

The Plain Woman collapses.

The sound of change grows louder, and is again accompanied by the sound of voices.

The Clown-like Woman re-enters in wanna-be vixen mode, but when she doesn't see the Bland Man, she suddenly switches gears.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

Ohhhhh, now you've lost him!

She throws her arms around the Plain Woman.

PLAIN WOMAN:

(muffled) Hey!!!

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

I know the signs, I can see it from a mile off. He's gone, he's cities away, he's in a different area code already. It's happened a thousand times, a thousand at least—you had it all and then you took one step over the line. One word too many, one demand, one threat, one ultimatum...

She releases the Plain Woman.

That's all it takes, you know. One too many "Or else." And then they're... somewhere else. With someone else.

The Clown-like Woman directs a penetrating glance at the Plain Woman and the lights begin to change, a reddish light darkening the stage except for the two women.

CLOWN-LIKE WOMAN:

You have to stay on top of these things—stay on track.

She smiles grotesquely and her entire face becomes a new mask.

Or form. That's a better way to put it.

She picks up the Plain Woman's drink.

I mean, who do you think you are, anyway? What man's going to want to have anything to do with you if you've got a mortgage and earthquake insurance and property taxes? You think someone's going to fix an air conditioner in a home that's not his? Going to move a washing machine into a garage without his tools in it? Get real, sister. Property is the worst kind of baggage.

She drains the scotch.

You know what you need to get? You need to get yourself a money guy!

With a throaty laugh, the Clown-like Woman throws down the handful of change. The coins are like a spray of bullets, hitting the bar, the glasses, the floor and the Plain Woman, who jumps up from her seat clutching her bag.

While sweeping her belongings into her purse, the Clown-like Woman knocks over her drinks. She exits as puce liquid spreads over the bar and begins to drip onto the floor.

More than tipsy, the Plain Woman grabs some change and instinctively mops up the spill with the only thing at hand, her own skirt. When she notices the huge streak of pale raspberry down her front, she begins to laugh and maybe also to cry.

PLAIN WOMAN:

I hate pink!

She reaches out for the stool, and finds that it is covered with sticky pinkness. She looks at her hands which are now coated pink, as are the coins in them.

When I was growing up I was surrounded by pink. Everything was pink: pink dresses, pink ribbons, pink blankets... and pink walls.

God! That was the worst of it. I was the only girl and my rooms were always pink! A pinky, pinky pink. If it wasn't plain pink, it was pink flowers or pink stars or pink stripes or pink people—pink animals. Different breeds of unnaturally pink animals.

PLAIN WOMAN:

Wherever we moved, pink followed me! I couldn't get away from it. The minute we were in a new house... Poof! My room was magically pink. I don't know how it happened, but where I was there was pink!

All my life, my whole entire life, I saw pink, I slept pink, I dreamt pink, I heard pink, I ate pink, I thought pink, I grew pink, I smelt pink, I felt pink... And I hated it!

She lets go of the coins which fall in a pink clump. In shadow, two or more figures appear behind the Plain Woman. They loom large and foreboding.

I am done with pink.

The Plain Woman wipes her hands on her skirt and hoists herself up onto one of the barstools, or straddles two of them.

There will be no pink.

Once she is standing, she turns her bag upside down releasing a deluge of coins.

Not in my house!

The coins spill onto the bar and into the glasses and show no signs of stopping as the lights fade and the bar—and perhaps the Plain Woman herself—becomes covered with silver and gold. The clinking sounds grow louder and even in the dark we can see and hear change, change and more change.

End of Play