



MODEL HOME



# MODEL HOME

A COMEDY IN NINE ACTS

by

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&

the Internet

NARRATOR: I have a memory of our first house, the one we lived in until the age of five, before the divorce.

...

NARRATOR: The memory plays out like a panoramic film, moving slowly between rooms, down hallways and stairs.

...

NARRATOR: The camera is placed very low to the ground, no more than a foot or two from the floor.

...

NARRATOR: The house is dimly lit and the image is fuzzy.

...

NARRATOR: Things seem to move on their own, in and out of closets.

...

NARRATOR: The frame is overwhelmed by a soft beige carpet that never ends.

...

NARRATOR: Sliding through the interior, I have the feeling of something lost in an ominous, haunting way.

TODAY: The Mueller family once owned seven homes and a bed and breakfast.

NARRATOR: This memory is the most accurate vision I have of the house.

TODAY: Today, they work minimum-wage jobs — but they're still living large.

NARRATOR: And at the same time, I can't be sure of it's adhesion to a visual reality.

TODAY: The family from Tampa, Florida, is part of a growing real estate trend in which people move into empty luxury homes for sale and essentially act as a "model family."

NARRATOR: Is this the home I think it is, or a construction?

TODAY: The family from Tampa, Florida, is part of a growing real estate trend in which people move into empty luxury homes for sale and essentially act as a "model family,"

NARRATOR: The memory jump-cuts to a scene from outside, at a distance. The house has a picket fence and a large playground in the back.

TODAY: human staging props used to turn a house into a home — for someone else.

NARRATOR: It looks perfect.

TODAY: "The home will sell faster and it's gonna sell for more money, and it sells for more money because it looks more valued and it's cared for," Kim Magnuson, the sales and marketing director for Showhomes Home Staging Tampa, told TODAY on Tuesday.

NARRATOR: The camera pans across and keeps panning, the image of the house quickly leaving the frame.

TODAY: Working with Showhomes, the Muellers live in a luxury house for about half of what it would cost to rent.

NARRATOR: There is rain on the lens, on the windshield.

TODAY: One catch: They have to keep the home immaculately clean all the time in case a prospective buyer stops by.

NARRATOR: I will never see the house again.

TODAY: "Never any dishes in the sink, always in the dishwasher, laundry never on top of the washing machine or the dryer," Dareda Mueller told TODAY.

NARRATOR: Except in this one memory.

TODAY: The family also has to leave the house at a moment's notice if a prospective buyer is coming to see it.

NARRATOR: I will dream of visiting it and peeking through the windows at the people who now live there.

TODAY: Once the property is sold, the family usually has about a week to move to another luxury property.

NARRATOR: I imagine them to be perfect, to live in total disregard of my existence. TODAY: "It gives you a two-week window that is very challenging," Bob Mueller said.

NARRATOR: They will have changed features of the home in decorative expressions of their ownership.

TODAY: "So you have like a week to pack up all your things, and then you have five days to unpack all those boxes."

NARRATOR: They will have no reason for knowing we used to live there, of why we don't live there anymore.

TODAY: "It's a lot of fun," Dareda said,

NARRATOR: They will not be implicated into the cause and effect of our lives.

TODAY: "It's very adventurous."

NARRATOR: In the 1994 modern country hit "Going through the Big D," Mark Chesnutt laments on how his wife won the house in their divorce settlement.

"I'm goin' through the Big D and don't mean Dallas..."

..

"...I can't believe what the judge had to tell us..."

...

"...I got the jeep and she got the palace."

TODAY: The family has lived in five houses over the past two years.

NARRATOR: When my parents divorced in 1995, my dad won the house but decided to sell it and move to Dallas.

TODAY: Before the housing downturn hit, they used to own seven homes and a bed and breakfast, but now they both work at McDonald's.

NARRATOR: "Going through the Big D" played often on the radio then.

TODAY: "Through, you know, the struggle of having been wealthier at one time and not as wealthy now, has really just helped us all pull together and draw closer," Bob said.

NARRATOR: I never felt sympathy for him.

TODAY: The family loves living the transient life, and celebrates every time one of "their" houses get sold.

NARRATOR: The pan continues and the atmosphere darkens. It is still raining. TODAY: "We sold the home, and then it's on to the next place," Dareda said.

NARRATOR: It is night time when the car pulls up to a new place, an apartment complex in a new city.

NARRATOR: The apartment is empty, except for a few hangers on the floor.

NARRATOR: We walk into what will be a bedroom. The lack of furniture makes it feel like nowhere.

NARRATOR: We spin around with our arms out and fall to the floor, onto the beige carpet.

NARRATOR: Perhaps we sleep there, right then. The shutter closes.



[END SCENE]

NARRATOR: I don't know how many times we move before we find a house for rent.

MONEY.CNN: As home managers, Calvonn and Crystena Starre rent a \$1.3 million home in Carlsbad, California, for just \$2,500 a month.

NARRATOR: My mother tells us we are lucky that the homeowner likes to rent to single mothers.

MONEY.CNN: About a third of what it would cost normally.

NARRATOR: She says this in a way that is both thankful and cautious.

MONEY.CNN: They're "hired" by Showhomes, a Nashville company that helps sell high-end homes.

NARRATOR: Like we shouldn't expect to receive such acceptance.

MONEY.CNN: But not everyone can get the gig -- Showhomes' acceptance rate is about 40%.

NARRATOR: Like it could be taken away at any time, if he sees crayon markings on the countertop or toys on the floor.

MONEY.CNN: Residents must undergo online background checks, including criminal and rental histories.

NARRATOR: The house was decorated in the 60s, with a sunken living room, brown shag carpeting, yellow walls with red accents.

MONEY.CNN: They're typically white-collar professionals who are in a city temporarily, newly divorced or, in the Starre's case, a family of five looking for a quick and easy rental.

NARRATOR: My mom hated it.

MONEY.CNN: With Showhomes, the Starres didn't need to make a long-term commitment -- they could leave their furniture in storage until they figured out where they wanted to live long term.

NARRATOR: We are always finding things left for us by the previous tenants.

MONEY.CNN: But what was a temporary move became a way of life.

NARRATOR: Yellow bell peppers in the back yard, a pair of jeans and a varsity sweater in the closet of our bedroom.

MONEY.CNN: Over the past two years, they've lived in five different Showhomes -- ranging from \$900,000 to \$1.3 million in value -- all in the San Diego area. The amenities have included everything from tennis courts to pools.

NARRATOR: The yellow walls make the light seem green at night.

MONEY.CNN: But it's not all a walk in the park. Showhomes has a number of restrictions for home managers.

NARRATOR: We sleep in metal bunk beds picked out by the boys that lived here before us.

MONEY.CNN: "You can't be a smoker, you can't have a bunch of pets, no religious items -- things that can deter [a buyer] one way or another," added Kelton.

NARRATOR: At night I imagine that all the former residents still live in the house.

MONEY.CNN: Personal items like family photos, sports teams and political paraphernalia are also prohibited.

NARRATOR: I dream of opening the closet where I found the jeans, but this time someone is sleeping there.

MONEY.CNN: And then there's the prospective buyers who could be surveying their home at a moment's notice.

NARRATOR: When we exchange places with the new renters all I remember is the carpet by the doorway.

MONEY.CNN: "We give up certain parts of our lives [for] the reduced rent," said Calvonn.

NARRATOR: My mother is trying to cover a stain there with her foot as she stands talking with the woman whose children are already crawling through the entryway dropping toys.

MONEY.CNN: They also have to move every time a place sells, with just about a month's notice, and maintain a spotless home in the meantime.

NARRATOR: She tells her how lucky they are that the owner likes to rent to single mothers.

MONEY.CNN: "You have to keep it clean and model home-ish," said Crystena Starre, a stay-at-home mom to her three kids.

NARRATOR: As if single mothers are the descendants of lepers.

MONEY.CNN: "We got to teach the kids, "We need to put things away."



[END SCENE]

NARRATOR: My mother works for a home building company, a fact that I'm aware is directly related to us owning a home.

LIFESCRIP: Ever walk through a model home and wish your home looked like that?

NARRATOR: The couple that built the home through her company decided not to buy it when it was finished.

LIFESCRIP: The first thing to do is to tour a few model homes until you've found one that suits your style.

NARRATOR: They felt it was too small, or they didn't like the layout.

LIFESCRIP: Make sure to go there with a purpose and a commitment not to fall in love with the house.

NARRATOR: After they moved on, no one else wanted to buy it.

LIFESCRIP: Once you've found a model that fits your family's style, take a careful look at the various elements that make the home shine.

NARRATOR: My mother tells us that it's very hard to sell a home that someone else has built.

LIFESCRIP: Is it the model home furniture?

NARRATOR: Everyone wants to start from scratch.

LIFESCRIP: The color palette? The accessories?

NARRATOR: There are no children in the neighborhood.

LIFESCRIP: Chances are it's all of these.

NARRATOR: There are five rooms, a bedroom for each of us.

LIFESCRIP: Now, step back and pay attention to what's not there.

NARRATOR: There is beige carpet and white tile.

LIFESCRIP: What's missing?

NARRATOR: . . .

LIFESCRIPT: . . .

NARRATOR: . . .

LIFESCRIPT: Clutter!

NARRATOR: My mother is never home and our house is always messy.

LIFESCRIPT: You won't find piles of bills on the desk, stacks of magazines scattered on the bathroom counter, or children's toys all over the floors.

NARRATOR: She tells us that the mess is what caused our father to leave.

LIFESCRIPT: The house doesn't look lived in.

NARRATOR: The mess seems like something unavoidable.

LIFESCRIPT: While some may find this type of environment sterile and unnatural, the lack of clutter does illustrate one of the central themes that model homes convey:

NARRATOR: Insurmountable.

LIFESCRIPT: a sense of spaciousness.

NARRATOR: Untethered by all of our slow chipping away each day after school. LIFESCRIPT: Imagine the same home filled with all of your belongings.

NARRATOR: There never seems to be enough time to fully eradicate it, to evacuate all the things that have come to pile.

LIFESCRIPT: Suddenly, the home doesn't feel quite so spacious.

NARRATOR: The mess swells, filling drawers and covering tables.

LIFESCRIPT: As bulky furniture, bookshelves, televisions, and toy boxes move in...

NARRATOR: She tells us that if she comes home and finds the mess still there, she will leave and never come back.

LIFESCRIPT: ...the illusion of spaciousness gives way to the reality that the home is cramped and overcrowded.

NARRATOR: She says the time will come when she'll finally do it, when she reaches her limit.

LIFESCRIPT: So, what's the solution for those who want to live in a model home yet want to be able to enjoy the comforts of home?

NARRATOR: I try to imagine what it will be like in order to prepare, the feeling of no one coming back through the door.

LIFESCRIPT: You don't have to banish all clutter in order to achieve a more spacious room, but you will need to pare down.

NARRATOR: I listen and gauge how much time passes between exit and re-entrance.

LIFESCRIPT: Start by taking a good, hard look at your existing home.

NARRATOR: For a period of time before the divorce, my dad pretended that he still lived with us.

LIFESCRIPT: Identify which spots are "clutter magnets."

NARRATOR: He would come over in the morning before we woke up and then again at night until we went to sleep.

LIFESCRIPT: For example, does the breakfast table always have a stack of newspapers on it?

NARRATOR: But when she talks about leaving, it's not a matter of pretend.

LIFESCRIPT: Do you add stuff to the stack throughout the day knowing that later on you'll take it out to the recycling bin?

NARRATOR: I try to imagine her leaving and where she would go.



LIFESCRIPT: When thinking about solutions, think about the problem and how to make it either disappear altogether or at least look more attractive.

NARRATOR: I try to gauge how long we could go on living there, just my sister and I, until someone found out.

LIFESCRIPT: Baskets and bins are an attractive storage solution that can disguise the clutter while providing you with a place to stash stuff.

NARRATOR: By taking the risk, I know we are terrible.

LIFESCRIPT: Look at the items you have on display such as knickknacks, ashtrays, candlesticks, whimsical figurines, and other collections.

NARRATOR: By letting her leave I know we deserve to be left.

LIFESCRIPT: When you first received these items, you probably loved them.

NARRATOR: By sacrificing her...in the name of what?

NARRATOR: Time?

LIFESCRIPT: Has time taken its toll?

NARRATOR: Laziness? Apathy?

NARRATOR: She talks about leaving many times, but she never follows through.

LIFESCRIPT: Do you still love them today?

NARRATOR: The mess grows.



LIFESCRIPT: Now, what would it take to convert your master bedroom into a retreat? NARRATOR: On weeknights we are usually at the office, and I like to run through the carpeted halls in my socks as fast as I can past grey cubicles.

LIFESCRIPT: The first step is to get rid of the ironing board and piles of laundry that you have stashed in the corner.

NARRATOR: Sometimes there are small cans of pineapple juice in the fridge.

LIFESCRIPT: Once the house has been de-cluttered and each room has a purpose, the fun of decorating can begin.

NARRATOR: The only other children we see are those of the custodial staff.

LIFESCRIPT: When decorating your home, use the model homes for inspiration and add your personal touch to make the design your own.

NARRATOR: If it gets too late, I nap on chairs in the conference room where a TV plays Spanish soap operas.

LIFESCRIPT: Model homes use decorative items sparingly because they want the model house to look spacious and they want the few items selected to have maximum impact.

NARRATOR: On the weekends we visit the model homes.

LIFESCRIPT: Simplicity often yields high-impact results.

NARRATOR: We make sure there is no stray garbage and that the fridge is stocked with bottled water, the bathrooms with toilet paper.

LIFESCRIPT: A model home has been expertly decorated to make an impact and convey a message to potential home buyers.

NARRATOR: While my mom works, my sister and I sneak through the rooms, inspecting the things there.

LIFESCRIPT: An upscale model house attracting upwardly mobile professionals may be filled with high-tech features and luxuries such as a home theater room or a spacious master retreat.

NARRATOR: Lying on the beds and shutting our eyes, pretending that we are waking up in our new homes.

LIFESCRIPT: A model home aimed at young families will feature family-friendly decorating ideas and have children's bedrooms meant to delight. NARRATOR: The children's rooms always have fantastic wallpaper and over exaggerated motifs.

LIFESCRIPT: Take your cues from a model home and incorporate some of the key concepts.

NARRATOR: We pretend to be these children, who are obsessed with the themes their rooms represent, tropical fish, 60s rock and roll, princesses, or the rainbow.

LIFESCRIPT: When you do, you will see that model homes aren't just for visitor tours.

NARRATOR: The books in the children's rooms and the parent's room are often the same.

NARRATOR: They are bound in leather or cloth with titles on the spines that we've never heard of. They don't have dust jackets or images.

INT. UNFINISHED ATTIC - DAY

NARRATOR: The television sets are always made of lightweight plastic and feature a single image, usually of someone participating in a leisure sport, on a jet ski or sailboat.

CAMERA: Close on Michael on an inflatable bed. He's been awake and thinking for some time.

NARRATOR: It's hard to tell what is real and what is not, or what real means here.

MICHAEL: What comes before anything?

NARRATOR: The books are real books, but something about them seems empty, generic. They are not intended to be read.

CAMERA: Cut to Michael's Son, George-Michael, sleeping on another inflatable bed. He opens his eyes.

NARRATOR: On the car ride home, my mother asks us which of the houses we would want to live in, and we imagine our lives cleanly unfolding in these dream scenarios.

MICHAEL: What have we always said is the most important thing?

NARRATOR: In the dream home, there are never any messes or arguments, and always enough food.

CAMERA: We reveal that the beds are head to head on the floor of an attic. Wood beams and exposed insulation surround them.

NARRATOR: In the dream home my mother does not want to leave and never come back.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: Breakfast.

MICHAEL: Family.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: Family, right. I thought you meant "of the things you eat."



[LAUGH

TRACK]

MICHAEL: Well, we've made nothing but sacrifices for this family, and tonight it all pays off! Tonight your granddad makes me a partner.

NARRATOR: My father and stepmother come inside the house for the first time to pick us up.

RON (V.O.): One of those sacrifices was Michael's decision to live here—

NARRATOR: We aren't allowed to let people inside because of the mess, but my sister is taking a long time to grab her things, long enough that it seems rude not to welcome them in.

#### EXT. SUDDEN VALLEY - DAY

NARRATOR: They are in the process of buying a new house, in another city we've never been to.

CAMERA: We see a sign that reads "Sudden Valley, A Bluth Co. Development"

NARRATOR: My stepmother stands in our combination kitchen-dining-room-living-room and says that perhaps they'll start out by getting a small house like ours.

RON (V.O.): —in the latest of his father's housing tracts.

NARRATOR: Though probably not this small, she clarifies.

CAMERA: We pull back to see that only one house has been built. A sign invites: "Have a look around!"

RON (V.O.): It should be noted that currently construction has only been completed on the model unit.

NARRATOR: Some nights we drive through neighborhoods that my mother's company has built where houses are marked for foreclosure.

#### INT. MODEL HOME - ATTIC / STAIRWAY

NARRATOR: My mother is given a list to mark off which houses have been vacated and which still have residents inside.

CAMERA: Cut to the inside of the house as the guys begin their day. They straighten up the attic and enter into the beautifully appointed model home.

NARRATOR: She tells us it's a common thing to get carried away in the building process and to come out with something you can't pay for.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: You think he's going to announce it on the boat?

NARRATOR: It even happens to people who work in the industry.

MICHAEL: Absolutely. It's his retirement party. Plus, he's been dropping a lot of hints. NARRATOR: They pretend to live in the luxurious houses they've built while in reality they live on the other side of town in small apartments, their houses still waiting on the market or sold to new buyers.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: What kind of hints?

NARRATOR: Many of the foreclosed houses have new cars in the driveway and big screen TVs shining through the windows out onto the street.

MICHAEL: Well, he's been calling me "pod'ner."

NARRATOR: I ask my mother if the cars or TVs are the reason that the families lost their houses.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: That's like partner.

NARRATOR: At the time I imagine all large things cost the same: houses, cars, televisions.

MICHAEL: And I don't think it's just because he's going through his "cowboy" phase.

NARRATOR: She tells me sometimes you just want to have something. You want your life to look a certain way, and it doesn't matter if you can afford it or not.

CAMERA: The guys make breakfast, and move into the dining room over the following.

NARRATOR: Often my mother buys groceries or makes home payments with a credit card.

MICHAEL: And then we'll be...free, you know? I'll be my own boss. I'll be able to get you what you deserve; a real home...

NARRATOR: She tells us that one day when she is no longer here, we will inherit her debt.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: This is a real home.

NARRATOR: Like the mess it is inevitable, insurmountable. It is larger than any number I've ever known.

CAMERA: Michael smiles, touched, then:

MICHAEL: No, it's not. It's a fake home.



NARRATOR: In the summers we go to summer school as a free form of childcare.

CAMERA: Michael removes two small boxes of cereal from within the large plastic turkey on the dining room table and tosses one to his son.

NARRATOR: There is no bus then, so we go to work with my mother until it is time for her to drop us off.

#### INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

NARRATOR: In the interim we take naps in the company design center, a room that's made to demonstrate all design features and accents available for your home.

CAMERA: The guys stretch out and get their bikes (leaning against the wall) over the following.

NARRATOR: It's a room where everything is repeated in different shades and styles.

CAMERA: They remove bike helmets from within a large fake palm tree.

NARRATOR: Every morning I sleep for an hour on a black leather couch across from the kitchenette.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: But it's a hell of a lot better than living like my aunt and uncles whose eyes have never stung from the sweet sweat of a hard day's work.

NARRATOR: The coffee table holds a ring of fabric swatches and a tray filled with glasses of iced tea.

MICHAEL: Whoa, whoa...where'd you get that?

NARRATOR: The tea is solid, translucent brown, and gelatinous with clear ice cubes molded into well defined squares.

GEORGE-MICHAEL: From you. You say it every couple of years when they come to visit.

NARRATOR: Each glass is topped by a thin slice of lemon punctured by the rim.

MICHAEL: Well, maybe you're right—maybe they have been spoiled. But you'll find you have more dignity when you learn the simple rule that—

NARRATOR: The glasses are real.

PROSPECTIVE BUYER ENTERS THROUGH FRONT DOOR

MICHAEL: —These closets are enormous!

GEORGE-MICHAEL: Can we buy it, Dad? Can we buy the house?

MICHAEL: Well, we better hurry, these things are going to get snapped right up.



[END SCENE]

NARRATOR: When a model home sells or is redecorated, the furniture goes up for auction among the employees first.

HOST: It's time for Americans Watching British TV. This time it's "Keeping Up Appearances" the popular BBC sitcom which ran from 1990 - 1995 starring national treasure Patricia Routledge as Hyacinth Bucket.

NARRATOR: My mother begins saving up for auction items, sometimes bringing home odd pieces of furniture that seem too large and new to be integrated into our home.

HOST: Each week Hyacinth commits the ultimate British crime, by trying to rise above her working class roots, which leads her into all kinds of embarrassing situations.

NARRATOR: In the end, these pieces usually go into the garage to wait for a time when they suddenly fit.

HOST: Other than the weekly humiliation of someone who's only trying to improve their life, it's pretty much harmless family friendly stuff.

NARRATOR: When the mess and the old things leave. Often the new things are strangely tropical, faux-exotic, or imitation baroque.

HOST: What will Americans think? Would it work in America?

NARRATOR: One day my sister calls me on the phone crying because my mother is trying to buy a new couch from one of the auctions.

AMERICAN 1: If she was a real person in America she would already be in jail or...at least...something bad would become of her.

NARRATOR: She tells me that the couch is red white and blue, like the American flag, and that it will cost over \$1,000.

AMERICAN 2: I don't think so.

NARRATOR: She hands the phone to my mother so that I can tell her that our old couch is fine.

AMERICAN 3: Absolutely, It'd be a little different but over here...well over here everyone just lives in debt.

NARRATOR: I make up a story about being emotionally attached to the couch, about how I've known it for my whole life...

AMERICAN 1: Maybe if everyone was really attractive. And lived in the suburbs...in the Midwest.

NARRATOR: ...about how you don't see the rips in the cushion covers if you don't know to look for them, about how \$1,000 is too much to spend on any one thing.

AMERICAN 3: You know, she's trying to keep up appearances but she's doing it within her budget.

NARRATOR: She says she just wants to have something *nice* for once, meaning something new.

AMERICAN 3: Over here everyone would just be horrendously in debt and pretend like everything's fine.

NARRATOR: She doesn't buy the couch.

AMERICAN 2: Despite her ridiculousness, you do kind of want her to succeed.



NARRATOR: One day I come home and the tray filled with glasses of gelatinous iced tea is on the coffee table.

HOST: So the verdict is...

JEZEBEL: In Being Farrah—a one-hour Teen Mom update special about Farrah Abraham—the reality star was shown living very well in a large, impeccably-decorated McMansion in Austin, Texas.

JEZEBEL: The issues of her "sex tape" and her new business venture of "novelty toys" were addressed, but written off as "mistakes" in her past that allow provide a nice home and nice car and nice things for her daughter.

JEZEBEL: There's even a guest house out back where her dad lives.

JEZEBEL: But is that really so?

NARRATOR: My mother decides to redecorate her house for the first time since she bought it.

JEZEBEL: According to her "chat" with the producer, she had only moved into the home a week before filming.

NARRATOR: She calls this "updating."

JEZEBEL: The house just seemed too perfect, too put together, too finished to be the brand new home of a busy, working single mom.

NARRATOR: She decides that the walls need to be painted a darker color, that the stair railings need to be black instead of white, that the carpet stained permanently by cats and dogs and kids should be hardwood or tile or laminate.

JEZEBEL: There wasn't a box in sight.

NARRATOR: She buys different paint colors to test and makes little squares on the walls

JEZEBEL: Every throw pillow, every rug, every vase, every ornamental plant was in its place.

NARRATOR: She removes the stair railings.

JEZEBEL: It looked staged.

NARRATOR: She rips up the carpet and feels liberated, but coughs for years afterwards from the dust and particles that enter her lungs.

JEZEBEL: . . .

NARRATOR: Rocky the chihuahua needs his trachea drained monthly.

JEZEBEL: So it wasn't much of a surprise to see the framed brochure for Scott Felder Homes hanging behind the producer's head in what was supposed to be Farrah's bedroom.

NARRATOR: The paint samples alone cost too much, so she has to wait to get the paint.

JEZEBEL: The house that appeared in Being Farrah was very much like the Woodrose model of the Rough Hollow development.

NARRATOR: The house stays in a position of in-between-ness.

JEZEBEL: Here is the office/study of the model home:

NARRATOR: The little squares on the wall seem like strange decorations.

JEZEBEL: And here is Farrah working in her office/study, with all of the same furniture and the same mural on the wall:

NARRATOR: The stairway seems unnerving because of its unexpected drop off point, like turning a sharp corner towards the edge of a cliff.

JEZEBEL: Here is the dining room of the model home:

NARRATOR: The floor is made of particle board with strips of staples pointing upwards. Shoes become necessary when going from room to room to avoid cutting feet.

JEZEBEL: Farrah's home has the same window treatments and dining room furniture set:

NARRATOR: The microwave is now missing its handle.

JEZEBEL: The kitchen from the model home:

NARRATOR: The washing machine has to be shut by the force of a heavy object.

JEZEBEL: Farrah's kitchen even has the same large plant on the left and the same stools:

NARRATOR: She uses a large fake potted palm.

JEZEBEL: The model home's sitting room:

NARRATOR: The dog finally passes away from the damage of dust to his lungs.

JEZEBEL: Farrah got rid of the nautical stuff but kept the curtains and the barstools.

NARRATOR: She keeps hoping that someone from the company will give her a deal, that she will have time off to finish the project.

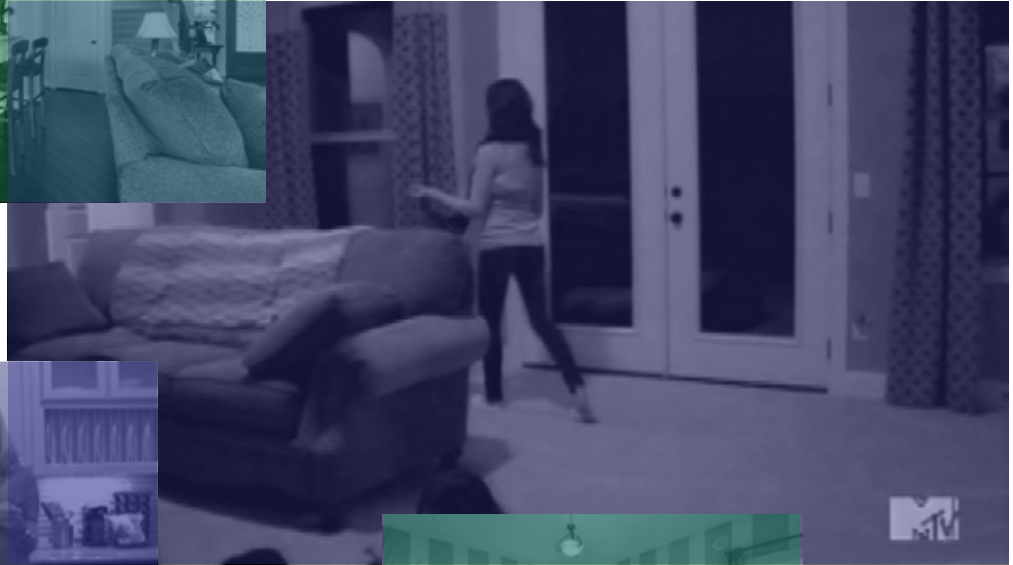
JEZEBEL: As of September, Farrah was leasing a modest two-bedroom apartment on the same block as her father, and had reportedly been living there since April.







NARRATOR: I am gone but the mess is still there, but she always comes home.



[END SCENE]

NARRATOR: The housing market crash of 2007 wasn't some big abstract thing for me.

PRODUCER: Initially it was hard asking if you could go into someone's house.

NARRATOR: It wasn't a "opportunity for investment" for those who "make good money in bad markets"

PRODUCER: We had to rely on the culture of, "Look at what we have," targetting rappers and athletes.

NARRATOR: Suddenly, most of my mother's friends were unemployed.

REDMAN: They wanted to display the inside of an artist's home, his household. That's a sacred space -- your home.

NARRATOR: But our lives didn't change drastically like the Muellers either.

REDMAN: While everybody was trying to show a lavish house, the lavish life of living, that's not always the case.

NARRATOR: We didn't own property. We didn't have as far to fall.

REDMAN: It was supposed to be my first real-estate project.

NARRATOR: Being the lowest paid employee at her experience and skill level, my mother fortunately did not lose her job.

REDMAN: I bought the place for real cheap, and I was going to fix it up and rehab it and put it back on the market.

NARRATOR: Instead she was forced to take on all the jobs of people who had been laid off, while receiving further cuts in pay.

REDMAN: But I ended up keeping it because I just loved the space, and I loved the seclusion of it.

NARRATOR: What she did lose was her ability to leave an increasingly abusive work environment.

CAMERA OPERATOR: It was definitely different. Usually we'll set up in a garage or something, because you have all the audio equipment as well.

NARRATOR: Where those whose money was at stake lashed out, anxious over their impending losses.

CAMERA OPERATOR: I think we set up in the kitchen, though, because I don't believe he had a garage. And you couldn't even ring the doorbell.

NARRATOR: But markets change, slowly.

REDMAN: I wanted to at least clean up a bit, since I ain't have any real furniture in there and shit, and I thought I had a little bit of time and I didn't.

NARRATOR: Sometimes now I get catalogs for CB2, and I look at them secretly before throwing them away.

CAMERA OPERATOR: Cribs always had two cameras. One is Steadicam that the talent would actually talk to.

NARRATOR: I try to imagine that I live in one of the rooms from the catalog spreads. CAMERA OPERATOR: And then you'd have a second handheld camera, which gets all of the B-roll.

NARRATOR: I try to think of ways to make my home more like an image of a home. CAMERA OPERATOR: It was tight because of the nature of the staircase and trying to get those cameras in.

NARRATOR: I try to work through whether or not it is permissible to crave a home that is not temporary.

REDMAN: You have to understand, my space is small. My space don't even have a back door -- there's one way in, and there's one way out.



NARRATOR: The thought is not attached to a reality.

PRODUCER: I remember when we got this footage back, being like, “What the fuck are we going to do with this?”

NARRATOR: It is not a decision I expect to have the luxury of making, and so the thought ends there as a vague what if.

PRODUCER: I was like, “This is funny, this is kind of hilarious.” But I remember saying to Toni Ann, “Is anyone going to want to watch this? Are we going to get in trouble?”

NARRATOR: I stopped dreaming of our first house a long time ago.

EDITOR: I can’t remember if prior to Redman there were any not-so-nice houses; it was all these beautiful houses, so it worked so nicely because you had all this space.

NARRATOR: For a short period I believed that I would wake up one day and find we still lived there, that the years following had been a highly detailed dream.

EDITOR: So we had all these speed-up effects, because you had so much space to get through.

NARRATOR: In the dream I never made it farther than waking up with the intangible realization.

EDITOR: You almost had to show a whole three-sixty of a room, and if you let it play out it would be boring.

NARRATOR: She said everyone wants to start from scratch.

EDITOR: But we knew this was not going to be a normal episode -- you’re not going to have those shots.

.....  
NARRATOR: Time rushing past on rewind before erasure.

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