

The Show Home

Chamber piece · 5-character play · 3 women, 1 man, 1 either · 30 min · Intermediate · Ages 12+

One October evening, on a new housing estate at the edge of town, the person from the agency is finishing the last viewing of the show home: a couple who want to move in, a mother who wants a bedroom for her daughter, and the daughter, who is leaving to live somewhere else in three weeks. At seven o'clock, the door stops opening. In every room, something is waiting for one of them.

The furnished living room of the show home at Les Hauts du Pré (a grey sofa, two chairs, a sideboard, a picture window looking out on empty plots), a new housing estate on the edge of a mid-sized town, one evening in late October, the present day.

Casting

NOA (No gender marker, Adult) age unknown, shows people round the show home for the agency, every evening.

VERA (Female role, Adult) 52, looking for a house with a bedroom for her daughter.

ZOÉ (Female role, Young adult) 20, Vera's daughter; moving to Lisbon in three weeks.

ELENA (Female role, Adult) 36, viewing the house for the third time.

MARCO (Male role, Adult) 39, Elena's partner, has the mortgage figures on his phone.

SCENE 1: THE VIEWING

(The living room of a new house. A bowl of green apples, a large bound register on the sideboard. A front door with a badge reader, a door to the kitchen, a corridor to the garage, a staircase.)

(Noa comes in from the kitchen, holding a tablet. Elena and Marco behind. Vera comes down the stairs. Zoé follows her, hands in her pockets.)

NOA. And here we are, the heart of the home. Thirty-eight square metres, south-facing. The window looks out over the future park.

MARCO. The future park, is that the field with the puddles?

NOA. That's the future park. The trees are on order.

ELENA. Marco.

MARCO. I'm only asking. In the brochure, there are trees. Out of the window, there's mud.

NOA. Come back in March, you won't recognise the place. Phase two will be finished in the spring, the school opens in September.

ELENA. In March, we'll be living here. This is our third viewing, Noa. You do remember us, don't you?

NOA. I remember everyone.

MARCO. The first time, you told us phase two would be finished in the spring.

NOA. And it will be.

ELENA. The school matters. For bedroom two.

MARCO. Bedroom two is an office.

ELENA. For now, it's an office.

MARCO. That's what I said.

VERA. How many are you hoping for, if you don't mind my asking?

ELENA. One. To start with.

MARCO. We never said "to start with".

ELENA. We've never said anything, Marco. That's why I'm saying it in front of witnesses.

VERA. Make the most of it. One day they're twenty and they explain to you that they don't need a bedroom.

ZOÉ. I never said that. I said: not here.

VERA. It's lovely, the little bedroom upstairs. Zoé, did you see the light it must get in the morning?

ZOÉ. It's dark, Mum.

VERA. In the morning, I said. When it's light.

ZOÉ. In the morning, I'll be in Lisbon.

VERA. You'll be here for the holidays. At Christmas. You need a bedroom somewhere.

ZOÉ. I'll have a bedroom. In Lisbon.

(Upstairs, a piano note. An A, just once.)

(Elena looks up towards the stairs.)

ELENA. Did you hear that?

NOA. The pipes. A new house settles in, it creaks, it sings a little. After a month, you don't hear it any more.

ELENA. It sounded like a note.

MARCO. It's a house, not a music school.

ELENA. I know what a note is.

MARCO. Since when?

ELENA. Everybody knows what a note is.

(In the garage corridor, a light comes on by itself. It stays on for a moment, then goes out.)

NOA. Motion sensors. All the hallway lights. You'll never fumble for a switch in the dark again.

ZOÉ. There was nobody in the corridor.

NOA. A cat outside, a leaf blowing past the glass. They get adjusted at handover.

(Noa puts the tablet down on the sideboard.)

NOA. I'm going to ask you one thing, all four of you. It's a bit silly, I ask it at every viewing. Close your eyes.

MARCO. Seriously?

NOA. Ten seconds. No obligation.

(Elena closes her eyes, then Vera. Marco is the last to close his. Zoé keeps hers open, and watches Noa.)

NOA. It's a Tuesday evening in November. It's raining. You come home, you drop your keys there, in the little dish. Something's cooking in the kitchen. Someone has laid the table. Someone is waiting for you. Can you see yourself living here?

(A pause.)

VERA. Yes.

ELENA. Yes.

MARCO. We'll see what the bank says.

(Marco opens his eyes and takes out his phone.)

MARCO. I ran the numbers. Twenty-five years, thirteen hundred euros a month. I'll let you know if I can see myself living here in 2051.

NOA. I'll take that as a yes. You can open your eyes now.

ZOÉ. Do you say that to everyone?

NOA. To everyone.

ZOÉ. And everyone says yes?

NOA. Almost everyone.

(Noa opens the register on the sideboard and holds out a pen.)

NOA. Before you go, the visitors' book. The agency insists. A name, a sentence, whatever you like.

(Elena takes the pen and writes.)

MARCO. What are you putting?

ELENA. "Elena and Marco. We can see ourselves here already."

MARCO. So you sign for me now, do you?

ELENA. I put you first, look. That should make you happy.

(She passes the pen to Vera, who writes in turn.)

VERA. "Vera and Zoé." Zoé, come and write something.

ZOÉ. I'm not buying anything. I'm not signing anything.

VERA. She's been like this since she was twelve.

ZOÉ. Since I was nine.

(Vera lays the pen back in the open register.)

MARCO. Last question, and then we'll leave you in peace. Is the price fixed?

NOA. It's the last house in phase one. There are two families after it tonight, I'm not telling you anything you don't know.

(Elena and Vera look at each other.)

NOA. But I can tell you the seller has some room on the fees. We're looking at around two hundred and seventy thousand francs.

(A pause.)

MARCO. Francs?

NOA. Euros. Sorry. Two hundred and seventy thousand euros.

MARCO. Nobody's counted in francs for quite a while.

NOA. Old habits. My parents counted in francs right to the end.

ZOÉ. Did your parents buy here?

NOA. No. Not here.

(Noa checks the time.)

NOA. Seven o'clock. We're closing.

SCENE 2: THE DOOR

(Noa goes to the front door and passes a badge in front of the reader. A low beep. The door stays shut.)

NOA. It does that when you rush it.

(Noa swipes the badge again. The same beep.)

MARCO. Can I try?

NOA. It's a badge, not a key. There's nothing to force.

(Marco turns the handle, pulls, pushes. He goes to the picture window, looks for a handle, finds none.)

MARCO. How does the window open?

NOA. It locks with the door. Everything locks together at seven. It's the security system.

MARCO. And what time does everything unlock together?

NOA. In the morning, when I arrive.

(Zoé takes out her phone, holds it up, turns it every which way.)

ZOÉ. No signal.

ELENA. Me neither, no signal. We had four bars in the car.

MARCO. My mortgage app still works. That's something.

NOA. It's the walls. Reinforced insulation. It keeps out the cold, and everything else along with it.

VERA. Call the agency.

NOA. My phone is in my car. The white one, over there, at the far end of the car park.

(Zoé goes to the window and looks out.)

ZOÉ. The one covered in leaves?

NOA. That's the plane trees.

ZOÉ. There aren't any trees. You said they were on order.

NOA. The leaves have to come from somewhere. The wind blows them in from the road.

ZOÉ. They're right up over the wheels.

(Marco grabs a chair, lifts it, and hurls it at the window. The chair bounces off and falls. The glass is untouched. It vibrates, and gives out a long note that slowly dies away.)

ELENA. That's an A.

MARCO. What?

ELENA. The glass. It made an A. The same one as upstairs, earlier.

MARCO. One day you'll explain to me how you know that.

NOA. It's laminated glass. It doesn't break, it sings. And it's an eleven-hundred-euro pane, so I'd rather the guard opened up.

(Zoé picks up the chair and puts it back in its place.)

NOA. The guard does a round of the estate at eight. He sees the light, he opens up. An hour, no more. The coffee machine works, shall I make you one?

MARCO. I don't want coffee, I want to get out. Electric locks, in case of fire, they release when you cut the power. It's the law. Where's the fuse box?

NOA. In the garage. At the back, to the left of the workbench.

MARCO. There's a workbench in a show home?

NOA. I don't think so, no.

(In the kitchen, a telephone rings. An old-fashioned ring, a real bell. Two rings, a silence, two rings.)

(Everyone turns to Noa.)

NOA. There's no telephone in the kitchen. There's no line. There has never been a line.

(Two rings, a silence, two rings.)

VERA. I know that ring.

ZOÉ. Mum, wait.

(Vera goes into the kitchen. The ringing stops halfway through a ring. Silence.)

ZOÉ. Mum?

(A pause. Vera comes back. Her hands are empty.)

VERA. There's a phone on the wall. Yellow. With the curly cord, hanging all the way down to the tiles. And above it, on the wall, the numbers in pencil. The doctor, the neighbour, my aunt. It's her handwriting. She always crossed her sevens.

ZOÉ. Did you pick up?

VERA. I picked up. Nobody spoke. There was a radio, far away. Running water. And plates. Someone was laying the table. Plates first, then glasses. She always did it in that order.

ZOÉ. Grandma died eleven years ago.

VERA. I know when she died, Zoé.

ZOÉ. Then it's a joke. Somebody's put an old phone in the kitchen and they're making it ring with an app.

VERA. I said hello. The sound of the plates stopped. Like when someone's listening.

(Marco goes into the kitchen. A pause. He comes back.)

MARCO. There's a yellow phone.

ELENA. You see? It's an agency thing. A bit of staging, for the viewings. Noa?

NOA. The agency hasn't got the budget for apples. They're plastic.

(Elena takes an apple from the bowl. It is plastic. She puts it back.)

MARCO. I'm going to the fuse box.

ELENA. I'll come with you.

MARCO. Stay here. There's nothing there. It's a garage.

(Marco goes out down the garage corridor. The corridor light comes on as he passes, then goes out.)

SCENE 3: THE GARAGE, THE BEDROOM

(A silence. Then, from the garage, a voice on the radio: football commentary, a crowd in the distance.)

ELENA. Has he put a radio on?

NOA. The garage is empty. I opened it this morning to air it.

ELENA. We never saw the garage.

NOA. Nobody looks at the garage. People look at the kitchen and the bedrooms. The garage, they discover on moving day.

VERA. Have you been doing this viewing long?

NOA. Every evening. In the mornings, families with pushchairs. In the evenings, people who work. The last viewing is always mine.

VERA. And there's never been anything, in the rooms?

NOA. Made beds. White duvets. A frame with a family photo, the same one in all our houses. Apples.

ZOÉ. Plastic ones.

NOA. They don't go off.

(The corridor light comes on. Marco comes back from the garage, slowly. Behind him, the radio carries on.)

ELENA. Well?

MARCO. The fuse box is to the left of the workbench.

ELENA. Did you switch it off?

MARCO. I switched it all off. Every switch, down. The radio's still going.

(The living room lamps, though, stay on.)

MARCO. It's my father's workbench.

ELENA. Marco.

MARCO. The green pegboard above it, with the little holes. He drew round every tool in black marker. The pliers, the saw, the screwdrivers from biggest to smallest. That way, when he walked in, he could see straight away what was missing.

VERA. And is something missing?

MARCO. The hammer. There's the outline of the hammer, and nothing in it.

ZOÉ. Why the hammer?

MARCO. Because I took it. The day I left his house. I was nineteen. I took it so he'd see the gap on the board when he came in, every evening. He saw it for twenty years. I didn't go to the funeral.

ELENA. You told me you hardly knew him.

MARCO. I knew him well enough to know what would hurt him most. The radio, that's the Sunday match. He listened to it while he planed. He turned it up

when we scored.

(The crowd on the radio, far away, swells and falls.)

(Upstairs, the piano note. An A. Five seconds, another. Four seconds, another. Three. Two. The gap keeps shrinking.)

MARCO. And that, is that the pipes too?

(Elena looks at the stairs. She goes towards them.)

MARCO. Elena, don't go up.

ELENA. I'll be right back.

(Elena goes up. The notes stop. A long silence. Only the radio can be heard, very low.)

VERA. Nothing to say, Noa?

NOA. I don't know what you're supposed to say, at this point in the viewing. Usually, by this point, people have gone.

(Elena comes back down. She stops on the bottom step.)

ELENA. It's my piano.

MARCO. You don't have a piano.

ELENA. An upright, black, with two brass candle holders that serve no purpose at all. The middle A sticks. You have to lift it with your fingernail. The music is open at page four. That's where I stopped.

MARCO. Stopped what?

ELENA. A competition. I was seventeen. There was a panel of three judges, with bottles of water. At page four, my hands stopped moving. I closed the lid and walked off the stage. I never touched a piano again.

MARCO. You told me you'd never played. At my sister's, in front of the little one's piano, you said: I don't even know where middle C is.

ELENA. I know where middle C is.

MARCO. You lied to me.

ELENA. You told me your father was someone you hardly knew.

(A pause.)

ZOÉ. The kitchen is for you, Mum. The garage, for him. The big bedroom, for her.

(Zoé looks up towards the floor above.)

ZOÉ. That leaves bedroom two.

SCENE 4: THE STARS

VERA. Zoé. Go up and look.

ZOÉ. No.

VERA. If it's for you, you have to see it.

ZOÉ. If it's for me, that's exactly why. I'm not going up.

ELENA. Don't you want to know?

ZOÉ. I know what's up there. I don't need to see it.

VERA. Then I'll go myself.

(Vera takes a step towards the stairs. Zoé grabs her arm.)

ZOÉ. You're staying here.

(The living room lamps dim slowly, all together.)

NOA. Half past seven. The house goes into night mode. It does it by itself, there's no stopping it.

(In the half-dark, little stars appear on the walls and the ceiling of the living room. They turn slowly. A music-box tune, thin, slightly out of tune, drifts down from upstairs.)

ELENA. It's pretty.

MARCO. It's not pretty, Elena.

ZOÉ. Turn it off.

NOA. I didn't turn anything on.

VERA. Your moon. The blue moon, with the stars cut out of it. You couldn't get to sleep without it.

ZOÉ. I broke it.

VERA. It fell. You knocked it over in your sleep.

ZOÉ. I threw it at the wall. The winter you were at Grandma's. You said two weeks. You stayed four months. Dad switched it on for me every night, and he said: your mother's looking at the same moon, over there. It wasn't true. Grandma didn't have a moon, she had a telly and a yellow phone. So one night, I threw it. The plastic split, and the music kept going. Under the bed. Broken, slower and slower, for an hour. I put my hands over my ears and I could still hear it.

(The music slows down, like a battery running out. Then it picks up again, at the right speed.)

VERA. I never knew.

ZOÉ. You never asked where it had gone.

VERA. I thought you'd grown out of it.

ZOÉ. I was nine, Mum.

VERA. Your grandmother didn't recognise anyone any more. She set three places every evening, one for her, one for me, and one for someone who never came. I couldn't let her lay the table on her own.

ZOÉ. Me, you could.

(A pause. The stars pass across their faces.)

VERA. I signed, Zoé.

ZOÉ. What?

VERA. A fortnight ago. I paid the deposit. The house is mine. That's why I wanted you to see it. Your bedroom is bedroom two. I chose it for you.

ELENA. It's sold?

MARCO. You had us come out three times for a house that's already sold?

ELENA. We've already chosen the colour for bedroom two. Sea green. We brought the colour chart on our second viewing.

VERA. Bedroom two is yellow. Pale yellow. I asked for it in yellow.

ELENA. It's sea green. I saw it earlier, on my way up. The door was open.

ZOÉ. It's whatever colour you want it to be. That's the whole idea.

NOA. It isn't sold. I haven't had anyone sign anything.

VERA. Yes, you have. Me. One evening. The last viewing. There was only me.

You had me close my eyes, you told me about the Tuesday evening in November, the rain, someone laying the table. I said yes. You gave me a piece of paper, and I signed it on the sideboard.

NOA. I don't remember you.

VERA. You had the same jacket on. You said: seven o'clock, we're closing. And you opened the door.

NOA. I don't remember a single evening.

ELENA. Earlier, you said you remembered everyone.

NOA. It's what we say, at the agency. People like to be remembered.

(A pause.)

NOA. I remember that it's the last viewing. It's always the last viewing.

ELENA. Then what about us? Which house are we viewing?

ZOÉ. The same one. It's always the same one.

(Zoé goes to the sideboard. She opens the visitors' book.)

SCENE 5: THE VISITORS' BOOK

(Zoé turns the pages of the register by the light of her phone. The stars keep turning.)

ZOÉ. "Vera and Zoé." Tonight. Above that: "Elena and Marco. We can see ourselves here already." Tonight as well. Further up: "Elena and Marco. We can see ourselves here already." And further up again. Three times. The same handwriting.

MARCO. You signed at every viewing?

ELENA. I don't remember.

MARCO. Do you remember signing tonight?

ELENA. Yes. Tonight, yes.

ZOÉ. "Vera. For Zoé." A fortnight ago. With a little heart on the Z.

VERA. It was for you.

(Zoé turns the pages, faster and faster.)

ZOÉ. There are hundreds of names. Families, couples, people on their own.

"We can see ourselves here already." "We can see ourselves here already." Everyone wrote the same sentence. The further back you go, the paler the ink. There are dates. 2019. 2011. 2004.

(Zoé goes back, follows a line with her finger, then another.)

ZOÉ. The names come back. Each one twice, three times, four times, a few weeks apart. They all signed more than once. And after the last time, nothing.

VERA. Nothing means they bought.

ZOÉ. It means they never left.

(Elena leans over the register, puts her finger on a line.)

ELENA. The Ferrands. "The Ferrands. We can see ourselves here already." They were our neighbours, when I was little. They moved out one summer, they left their dog with us for the weekend. They never came back for him. My mother said they'd found a new house, somewhere.

MARCO. What is this estate, two years old?

NOA. It's new. Phase one has only just been finished.

ZOÉ. How long have you worked here, Noa?

NOA. Since it opened.

ZOÉ. And when was that, the opening?

NOA. In the spring.

ZOÉ. Which spring?

(Noa doesn't answer.)

ELENA. The school opens in September. You said so earlier.

MARCO. And phase two in the spring. And the price, in francs.

ZOÉ. And how do you get home, in the evening?

NOA. I take the car. The white one.

ZOÉ. It's got leaves right up over the wheels. How long since it last moved?

NOA. In the morning, when I arrive, it's already light. The apples are in the bowl. The beds are made. In the evening, I do the last viewing, and I say: seven o'clock, we're closing. And then it's morning.

VERA. And in between, what do you do?

NOA. There is nothing in between.

(Zoé reaches the first page. She stops.)

ZOÉ. The first page. Three lines, the same handwriting. "Evening viewing. I can see myself here already. Noa." The last one, the 24th of October 1998.

ELENA. It's the 24th of October today.

(Zoé turns the register towards Noa. Noa comes closer and looks at the page.)

NOA. That's my handwriting.

ZOÉ. It was you who came to view it. Those evenings, you were the viewing.

NOA. I came to view it, yes. Three evenings. Or I dreamt it.

(A pause.)

NOA. I was looking for something small. One room, a kitchen, a window. No one with me. There was someone from the agency, with a badge and a jacket like mine. I don't remember the face. I remember the voice. Close your eyes. It's a Tuesday evening in November. It's raining. Someone has laid the table. Someone is waiting for you. I closed my eyes and there was someone waiting for me. For the first time in my life, there was someone. I said yes.

VERA. And when you opened your eyes?

NOA. I was handed the badge. And the door opened. Someone walked out. I didn't look who.

MARCO. And the person who was waiting for you?

NOA. I never found them. I show people round. I look for them in every room, at every viewing. There's nothing but white duvets and apples.

(Noa runs a hand over the page, over the line signed Noa.)

NOA. You've all got a room. All I've got is the living room.

SCENE 6: CLOSING TIME

(Noa checks the time. Zoé goes to the window. Outside, the car park, the white car under the leaves. Not a single torch. Nobody.)

NOA. Eight o'clock.

ZOÉ. There's nobody there.

NOA. I've never seen the guard. I was told he came round at eight.

(In the kitchen, the phone rings. Two rings, a silence, two rings. In the garage, the radio swells again. Upstairs, the piano's A, and the music box underneath. All at once, not very loud.)

ELENA. I want to finish page four.

MARCO. Elena.

ELENA. Just page four. I know the rest by heart. I've played it in my head for nineteen years, on the bus, in the shower, in meetings. I've never once been able to play it with my hands.

MARCO. If you go up, you won't come back down.

ELENA. You don't know that.

MARCO. They all came back, Elena. Twice, three times. And the last time, nobody left. This is our third viewing.

ELENA. You didn't want this house. You didn't want a child. You didn't want anything that lasts. Tell me what you want, for once in your life, and I won't go up.

(A pause. The radio in the garage, the crowd roaring.)

MARCO. I kept the hammer. It's in the boot of the car. Twenty years I've moved it from one boot to the next, every car I've had. I've never used it.

ELENA. That's not what I asked you.

MARCO. It's all I've got.

NOA. There's a hammer in the garage cupboard. A new one, with the label still on. It comes with the house.

MARCO. It's not his.

NOA. The outline on the board can't tell the difference.

(A pause. Marco takes out his phone, looks at the mortgage figures. He puts it down on the sideboard, next to the visitors' book.)

MARCO. You asked me what I want. I want him to walk into his garage one evening and not see the gap any more. Just once. That's what I want.

ELENA. You know what it costs.

MARCO. I can count. It's what I do best.

ELENA. I played every day. Four hours, before school and after. The piano is the only thing I ever lied to you about.

MARCO. I lied to you about the child. I said I didn't want one. I didn't want it to have a father who walks out with the hammer.

ELENA. It would have had bedroom two.

MARCO. Sea green.

(The garage corridor light comes on by itself, and stays on.)

ELENA. See you after.

MARCO. After what?

ELENA. After page four.

(Marco goes out down the garage corridor, without waiting. Elena climbs the stairs without looking back.)

(In the garage, a hammer on a nail. Three blows. The radio cuts out dead.)

(Upstairs, the A no longer sticks. The piano plays. One phrase, then the next, without stopping.)

(A bright beep. The front door opens by itself. A cold wind blows in, and dead leaves with it.)

NOA. Zoé. You didn't sign anything.

ZOÉ. Come with me.

NOA. Someone has to lock up.

(Zoé takes her mother's hand.)

ZOÉ. Come on.

(She pulls her to the threshold. In the kitchen, the phone rings. Vera stops.)

VERA. You go. I'll answer it, and I'll catch you up.

ZOÉ. You said two weeks.

VERA. I know.

ZOÉ. You said two weeks, Mum, and you stayed four months.

VERA. She's laying the table all on her own, Zoé. She always set three places.

ZOÉ. The third one was for me.

VERA. Earlier, when Noa had us close our eyes, I saw my mother's kitchen. The plates, the phone cord, the checked tablecloth. I looked for you in the kitchen, Zoé. I couldn't find you. You weren't in the picture.

ZOÉ. I don't want a bedroom. I want you to come.

VERA. Go on ahead. I'm right behind you.

(Vera lets go of Zoé's hand. She turns up the collar of her daughter's coat and fastens it right to the top.)

VERA. It's cold out there.

(Zoé goes out. The door closes. A low beep.)

(Vera goes into the kitchen. The ringing stops.)

VERA. Hello? Mum? Yes, it's me. No, stay sitting down. I'll do the glasses.

(Only Noa is left in the living room. The piano, upstairs. The music box. The stars turn.)

(Noa picks up the pen and lays it back in the open register. Noa puts a plastic apple back in the bowl, switches off the last lamp.)

(Outside, against the picture window, a hand presses flat on the glass. The stars pass over it, one by one.)

(Noa looks at the hand. The hand slides along the glass, towards the door, and disappears.)

(The doorbell rings.)

(Noa tugs the agency jacket straight, goes to the door and swipes the badge. A bright beep. The door opens, the hall light comes on. Zoé is on the doorstep, her coat fastened right to the top, leaves in her hair.)

NOA. Good evening. Are you here for the viewing?

ZOÉ. Yes.

NOA. Come in. Close your eyes.

(Zoé comes in. She closes her eyes.)

(Blackout.)



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