

My Home is My Castle

by

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Teen Toni must decide what she values when her favorite social media influencer goes viral mocking her father's latest project

EXT. PORCH OF HOUSE - DAY

Close up of a hand holding a phone. Through the phone, we see a beach crowded with cheering COLLEGE STUDENTS and SANDMAN, a textbook surfer-dude in his mid 30s.

SANDMAN  
Yooooo, Sandman here!

To the continuing cheers, he turns the camera to reveal a detailed replica of the Taj Mahal built entirely from beach sand. It is an artistic masterpiece.

SANDMAN  
Better than the real thing! Check it out. C'mere, C'mere.

He waves over a YOUNG CO-ED who stands embarrassed beside his sand castle.

Sandman's delivery is polished and slick, but slightly brittle.

SANDMAN  
It's bigger than she is!  
(Flipping the camera back to himself)  
Alright, you know the drill. Like. Subscribe. Share with all your friends.  
(With exaggerated nonchalance)  
Or maybe you hate beauty and your dream is this dump.

A photo appears on the screen of a small house under construction. Covered scaffolding and plastic sheeting, it's ugly, old before its time. We hear a faint gasp.

The phone video cuts back to Sandman's laughing face, the massive sandcastle and the cheering crowd.

SANDMAN  
Sandman out!

The hand holding the phone falls out of frame. For the first time, we see a teenage girl, TONI, 19. She's wearing a filthy tank top and ripped jeans, sitting on the porch of the ugly house we just saw in the picture.

Behind her we see MICHAEL, mid 40s, wearing a tool belt. He's mounting a piece of siding. It's weathered and an ugly green color.

Toni slowly removes her earbuds, clearly wounded by what she's just seen and heard. She gazes at the run-down looking house and shakes her head. Rising, she stuffs her phone in her pocket and makes her way over to Michael.

MICHAEL  
Finished with the ah Insta....  
(He fumbles the term and  
grinds to a halt)  
Well, I could use some more of--

TONI  
(Interrupting)  
Are you sure we should be putting  
this stuff up?

Michael flashes a smile at her and nods as he continues working.

MICHAEL  
It's not pretty, but...

He finishes anchoring the board and then gives it a good hard yank. It doesn't move.

MICHAEL  
(cont.)  
This is good, hard wood. It's been  
out in the elements, but this ugly  
paint protected it. It's still  
strong.

He smiles at her again, all warmth and love. She frowns, turning away. Michael sags, his eyes following Toni like she is miles away. Reluctantly, he returns to work.

Halfway toward a battered, old pickup, she stops. She makes fists at her sides and then slowly releasing them before looking back at Michael. He is putting up another piece of siding.

TONI  
Don't you want to make something  
beautiful, though?

Michael stops what he's doing. There's regret in his eyes as he nods. He pats the partially mounted siding.

MICHAEL  
We'll polish it up as best we can  
once everything is solid.

Toni huffs, and Michael wilts a little more.

TONI  
You're an amazing craftsman, Dad.  
You could build a house that would  
leave people breathless.

Michael sets down his tools and walks toward Toni.

TONI

(cont.)

I just saw a guy online who  
built--

As he reaches her, he puts a hand on each of her  
shoulders. She stops speaking.

MICHAEL

We've work to finish. Okay?

Toni shakes him off with a huff and stomps to the back of  
the pickup truck for more siding.

CUT TO

EXT. SUNNY BEACH - DAY

SANDMAN

You both looked great! Thanks for  
coming out.

He's talking to a couple of the college students, his  
sand castle in the back ground. While they're all  
standing together, the students are focused on their  
phones.

YOUNG MAN

(Shaking his head)

Where did you get the janky photo  
of that house?

He looks up at Sandman for the first time.

SANDMAN

Believe it or not, it's just up  
that road.

(He waves a hand)

Drove past it when I was location  
scouting this place. There was  
some guy there, slaving away, like  
he was making the pyramids or  
something.

They all laugh.

YOUNG GIRL

(Looking at the image on  
her phone)

Why would anyone build anything so  
ugly?

SANDMAN

(Shaking his head)

You're coming tonight, right?  
Another live stream. Glow sticks.  
Body paint. It's gonna be sick.

They shake their heads.

YOUNG GIRL

We just came to see the Taj. DJ  
Phizzy is streaming at Club Thick  
tonight--

SANDMAN

(Desperate)

No. C'mon. You're my people. Don't  
be going to Phizzy--

YOUNG MAN

He's growing. His last stream had  
2 million views.

(apologetic)

We want to be part of something  
huge.

SANDMAN

(His attention already  
turned to his phone)

Yeah. Cool. Cool.

As they walk away, the phone shows his rising view count.  
He's up over 100k. He swipes to DJ Phizzy's account and  
sees the 2 million.

Sandman gazes after the departing college students.

SANDMAN

(muttering)

You work to build something and  
the new guy shows up and steals it  
away. I need to get back on top.

His phone dings. He looks down at a new comment: "That  
house, though!"

CUT TO

EXT. UGLY HOUSE - DAY

Michael stands near the pickup truck talking on his  
phone. Behind him, Toni is working on the frame for the  
missing front door.

TONI

(Shouting)

Dad! We're just about out of wood  
screws!

He lowers his phone slightly to speak to her.

MICHAEL

Thanks, honey.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
 (Lifting the phone again)  
 No. The siding is great, actually.  
 How about the roofing? Is there  
 anything you can donate?  
 (He listens)  
 I'm not worried about weight. The  
 frame can handle it. Yeah, okay.  
 That could work. Thanks.

He hangs up the phone turning toward Toni.

MICHAEL  
 (Cont.)  
 I'm gonna run to the store for  
 more screws. Wanna come?

Toni looks around them at the run down homes and the bad neighborhood, then scurries to climb in the truck. Michael climbs in next to her and offers her a big grin before starting the vehicle and driving away.

A moment later, Sandman hops out of a convertible and jogs toward the house, talking into his phone.

SANDMAN  
 People keep asking me about this  
 run down junk heap.

He pauses, posing in front of the house.

SANDMAN  
 (cont.)  
 The Sandman is here to give the  
 people what they want.

He moves through the empty doorframe into the house.

INT. UGLY HOUSE - DAY

Sandman explores the house, narrating and holding his phone so that his face is always being filmed. The inside is an eclectic collection of building materials. One wall is made up of plywood sheeting, the next is bits of left over sheetrock meticulously puzzled and mudded together. He stops to admire a section of plywood covered in graffiti.

SANDMAN  
 Look at this place! Every board is  
 scavenged from a dump!

At the end of a hallway he finds a closed door. The door is covered in several different shades of paint, and in one place, it's been partially sanded away to reveal bare wood.

SANDMAN

Ooh. Check this out.

(Speaking in a lower register)

Police! I'm coming in!

He kicks the door with all of his might and it doesn't move. He stumbles backward and falls, dropping his phone. Embarrassment flashes across his face and then he fakes a laugh, as he scoops up his phone.

SANDMAN

That was sick! Ha ha! I guess the termites haven't gotten that door yet.

(To the door)

But they're coming for you!

(More serious)

You see folks? There's a lesson here. Some loser is putting all of his precious time and treasure into this. What a waste, huh?

Michael emerges from the shadows behind him, his brows sitting low over his eyes. Toni peaks around Michael's shoulder. Fear etches her face. She recognizes Sandman and turns crimson.

SANDMAN

(Cont. oblivious)

All of this effort, tacking together bits of old junk? This place is like a bad collage. When everything is done, this clown will have built an everlasting monument to his bad taste!

MICHAEL

(To Toni)

Did you invite him here?

Sandman jumps, turning to Michael in fright. Toni shakes her head, backing off. Sandman recovers almost instantly.

SANDMAN

(To his phone)

That's him, guys! The genius who's building this hovel.

(Swinging the camera to Michael)

What's your story, dude? Is this your dream home?

Sandman laughs. Toni surges around Michael, raising a pointing finger at Sandman.

TONI  
You--you don't--you....

She can't find the right words. Her cheeks turn red.

SANDMAN  
(mocking)  
I--I--don't what? Use your words,  
bae.

Michael gently moves Toni aside and steps forward. The shift between his gentleness to Toni and his physical threat to Sandman is striking.

MICHAEL  
Get out. This isn't public  
property.

SANDMAN  
(Nodding with false  
sympathy)  
Yeah, I get it. I wouldn't want  
the world to see this dump,  
either.  
(To Toni)  
What about you, babe? Proud of  
your old man's turd hut?

She turns red and runs out of the room. Michael gives Sandman one more threatening look and goes after Toni.

SANDMAN  
(To camera)  
That, kids, is the moral of this  
story. Don't make things that are  
so ugly they make your children  
cry.  
(He laughs)  
And don't forget the hopping'  
party tonight at the Sand-Taj! One  
night only. Sandman out!

He clicks off his live stream, and looks after Michael and Toni. There's regret in his eyes.

SANDMAN  
They say people want drama... If  
that won't draw a crowd, I don't  
know what will.

He walks away.

CUT TO

EXT. PORCH OF HOUSE - EVENING

We hear a door slam and hear a car pulling away.

Michael sits down next to Toni on the edge of the porch, their legs dangling into the long grass. She's wiping her eyes.

TONI

Why are we doing this?

Michael offers her a chagrined smile.

MICHAEL

Don't let that guy get to you--

TONI

No. I mean it. Why are we building... this?

She's running her hand along the boards that form the porch. Their edges wave, the cuts haphazard, but they've been painstakingly assembled, like a puzzle, so they fit tightly together and the wood is sanded smooth.

MICHAEL

(frowning)

Sorry. I thought it would be good for us to do this together. I wanted...

(He bites his lip)

I wanted some time just us.

TONI

Couldn't 'just us' have built something that isn't going viral on the internet as the ugliest thing ever made?

MICHAEL

(Getting irritated)

When you decide to build something with a future, the people who only care about right now won't get it.

She shakes her head.

TONI

My friends all watch him, Dad.

They're going to see me.

(looking around)

They're going to see this.

MICHAEL  
 (Going pale)  
 Sorry. I...  
 (He shakes his head)  
 I don't care what people think--

Toni pulls back, offended. She opens her mouth to call him out, but he continues:

MICHAEL  
 (Cont.)  
 I care what you think of me.

He looks down, unable to meet her eyes. The silence grows uncomfortable. He keeps swallowing and moving his lips, but doesn't say anything.

Toni glares at him, and then shakes her head, staring off into the night.

Another car pulls to a halt in the background, IZAN, mid 20s, climbing out and going to the passenger door to help his GRANDMOTHER, an elderly woman, out of the car.

TONI  
 You say you care what I think, and  
 then you make me a laughing stock  
 to the whole wor--

IZAN  
 Hello?

Toni and Michael look at one another, her angry, him ashamed. Slowly, Michael gets to his feet. He offers Toni a hand. She takes it reluctantly. He helps her up and they walk toward the front door.

Izan and his grandmother meet them there. She moves slowly, stooped over her cane.

IZAN  
 Hello, you're Michael?  
 (Michael nods)  
 I'm Izan. This is my grandmother.  
 I wanted her to see the house you  
 are building.

MICHAEL  
 Of course, Izan. Come on in.

Toni watches the two strangers enter, confusion on her face.

CUT TO

INT. UGLY HOUSE - EVENING

Toni comes through the door behind the newcomers and Izan turns to her.

IZAN

You are his daughter?

(She nods)

I didn't think we would ever own a home of our own.

He flashes her a smile and turns back to his grandmother, gesturing expansively at the modest entry hall. As his hand sweeps past the wall, it is suddenly gleaming white plaster, hand painted with bright golden suns, and soft green leaves. The image fades back to the patchwork of sheetrock.

Toni narrows her eyes, uncertain what she's just seen.

IZAN

(cont.)

Look, *abuela*. This is where my baby will take her first steps.

Izan points through the doorway into the living room. We see the flooring, polished and gleaming, stained a rich tone and covered in a beautiful patterned rug. Tiny feet toddle from wood to carpet and we hear the soft giggle of a little girl.

The images fades, and once again the living room is unfinished wooden planking, rough and unstained.

Toni steps around Izan, moving toward her father.

MICHAEL

We'll give you two a moment.

Izan helps his grandmother into the living room. Toni stops to watch them, peeking around the door frame.

The room is humble, lacking any expensive fittings, and yet everything is finished beautifully. The walls gleam with hand painted plaster. The floors shine with polish. Portraits of a growing family decorate the walls. Grandmother rocks in a chair by the window, as a beautiful woman, LUCIA 20s, steps from the kitchen bearing a tray of food. TWO SMALL CHILDREN cling to her legs.

In the middle of the room Izan stomps on the floor, and as his second stomp lands, the room returns to its present state. He smiles through the doorway at Toni.

IZAN  
 (Grinning)  
 Everything here is solid.  
 (turning to grandmother)  
 When I am gone, my little girl's  
 children will live here, too.

The grandmother's face opens into a big smile and she pats Izan's face with her palm.

Toni steps into the living room as it transforms again. She sees Izan, old, a bit fat and gray-haired bouncing a LITTLE GIRL on his lap. Another YOUNG WOMAN, not Lucia, calls the child, who hops down and runs into the kitchen. Izan falls asleep.

Toni blinks. The room returns to normal.

IZAN  
 (Bubbling with  
 enthusiasm)  
 Come. You have to see the kitchen.  
 When Lucia sees it...  
 (He laughs)  
 Come.

Izan helps his grandmother toward the kitchen as Toni wipes a tear from her eye and moves back to her father.

TONI  
 Meeting them...

Michael smiles at her.

MICHAEL  
 It changes things.

She nods, taking a hold of his arm, she clings to him like he's anchoring her.

TONI  
 You did something beautiful, Dad.

MICHAEL  
 We did.

She hugs him.

TONI  
 It doesn't matter what my friends  
 think. They'll forget Sandman and  
 his video. I'll have this moment  
 forever.

CUT TO

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

As the sun sinks into the water, Sandman sits alone on the beach, his face lit by his phone screen. A box of glow sticks and some tubs of paint lay unopened beside him.

Far down the beach, a young couple in love stroll in the sunset, but otherwise the beach is deserted.

Sandman's house video has nearly 200k views. Swiping his phone, we see DJ Phizzy's feed. Over a million views on the counter, and a huge crowd. Sandman kicks the empty box, frustrated. In the background the waves slowly wash away his masterpiece, but Sandman never looks away from his phone.

FADE OUT

