

CLICK BAIT

A horror in one act
by
Bradley Hayward

PREVIEW ONLY!

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SYNOPSIS

Frank struggles to keep his memories alive after moving in with a stepdad who wants to erase the past. During a surreal nightmare, Frank must choose between holding onto his history or letting himself be rebuilt from scratch.

CHARACTERS

(1M + 1-7 Either)

FRANK.....Quirky & nostalgic, male, 13.
RICHARD 1.....Frank's stepdad, either.
RICHARD 2.....Frank's stepdad, either.
RICHARD 3.....Frank's stepdad, either.
RICHARD 4.....Frank's stepdad, either.
RICHARD 5.....Frank's stepdad, either.
RICHARD 6.....Frank's stepdad, either.
RICHARD 7.....Frank's stepdad, either.

SETTING

A bare stage.

RUNNING TIME

10 minutes.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The roles of RICHARD 1-7 were intended to be performed by the actors playing Newton, Chester, Vera, Beatrice, Evelyn, Ruth, and Stanley from the other plays in "Thirteen in 10 Minutes or Less." However, they could be played by entirely different actors.

The ensemble of RICHARDS is incredibly flexible and may be played by 1 actor, 7 actors, or any combination in between. This play is a nightmare, so a large ensemble of RICHARDS would be very terrifying. Likewise, 1 person playing all of the RICHARDS would be a remarkable challenge for an actor.

The RICHARDS may be played by actors of any gender identity.

(AT RISE: A bright white spotlight hits the middle of the stage. FRANK sits on the floor in the light. He clutches an old leather suitcase close to his chest. In his other hand, he holds a smartphone. He stares at it for a moment, then taps the screen. A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 1

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 1 enters, wearing a white paper mâché mask that covers his entire face. He seems normal, but there's something not quite right about him.)

RICHARD 1

Hey, buddy. You're still up. It's late. You're gonna be tired for your first day at the new school. Why don't you put the suitcase down, Frank?

FRANK

(Holds the suitcase tighter)

I like holding it.

RICHARD 1

I know you do. But it's old. It smells like a guy who died fifty years ago. Your mom and I got you that new dresser. The one with the wood grain laminate. It has that new furniture smell. Why don't we put the stuff from the suitcase into the new dresser?

FRANK

This suitcase belonged to a mailman named Sandy. Which is short for Alexander. He walked in the rain and his hands touched this handle every single day. If I put his things in a plastic dresser, Sandy disappears. The leather remembers him.

RICHARD 1

I'm your dad now. And in this house, we don't keep things that smell like death. We keep things that are clean. Today I went to the dentist. Just look at my teeth. They're brand new. They don't have any history on them. That's what we want. A clean slate. So drop the suitcase. Just drop it on the floor.

FRANK

(Shakes his head)

No.

RICHARD 1

Your dad is gone. Your old house is gone. Your old room is gone. This suitcase is the last bit of mouldy bread in the kitchen, and I'm trying to help you throw it in the trash. Open the latches. Let me see what's inside so I can throw it away for you. Let go of the suitcase.

(A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 2

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 2 enters, wearing a mask with a pig snout in the middle of it. He's incredibly stern and obsessed with money.)

RICHARD 2

That suitcase is taking up premium square footage, Frank. Space isn't free. Air isn't free. Every minute you sit here holding that old leather, you're losing money.

FRANK

I don't care about money.

RICHARD 2

Everyone cares about money! Money is new. It's crispy. It smells like ink. Old things are a bad investment. What's inside that suitcase? Is there cash in there? Is it old coins? Let me look inside. If there's silver, we can melt it down. We can turn Sandy the mailman into a brand new five dollar bill.

FRANK

There are no coins in here. It's just letters. And an old hat. Things people forgot to keep.

RICHARD 2

Letters don't earn interest, buddy. A dead guy's hat has zero retail value. I did the math on your old life. Your old dad? Bad credit. Your old house? Foreclosed. I bought your mom a new wedding ring. It sparkles so bright that it hurts to look at. I want to buy you a new life, but you're clogging up the system with this dead man's baggage.

FRANK

I don't want a new life.

RICHARD 2

Give me the suitcase. Let me open the locks. I can sell the leather to a shoe factory. They'll grind it up. They'll make a brand new boot. A boot with no memories. Let me have it. Let me get rid of Sandy. Come on. Open it.

(A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 3

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 3 enters, wearing a jester mask with a painted-on smile. He's full of joyous energy.)

RICHARD 3

Hey! Hey hey hey! Look at me, Frank! Look at the funny man! Am I your favourite? I bet I'm your favourite!

FRANK

No. Go away.

RICHARD 3

Aw, don't be like that! We're buddies! We're pals! I'm the fun dad! The cool dad! Do you like jokes? Why do melons have weddings? Because they cantaloupe! Ha ha! High five! Give me a high five!

FRANK

I don't want to.

RICHARD 3

Come on, buddy! I just want you to like me! I bought you a giant box of those fruit snacks you like. The ones shaped like cartoon trucks. They don't even have real fruit in them! It's pure chemicals! I'll let you eat them in bed. I'll let you stay up until four in the morning watching videos of cars getting crushed in a giant metal squisher! Isn't that fun? Aren't I a fun guy?

FRANK

My dad used to take me to the library on Saturdays. We read books about old trains.

RICHARD 3

Trains are slow! Trains take too long to get places! Trucks are fast! New things are fast! Look at me, I can do a magic trick! Watch! I'm going to make that ugly old suitcase disappear! Yay! Fun! Let me have it, buddy! Let me take it! We'll throw it in the big metal squisher together! It'll be a game! A fun game for my best friend! Give it to me! Give it to your new best friend! Let go! Let go!

(A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 4

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 4 enters, wearing a wrinkly old man mask, with a knitted cardigan over his shoulders. He's overly kind.)

RICHARD 4

Oh, Frank. You poor kid. Look at you, you're shaking. They shouldn't have done that to you. That was way too much.

FRANK

Are you going to yell at me, too?

RICHARD 4

Of course not. Never. I know how hard this move has been on you. Everything changing all at once. A new house, a new school, your mom marrying someone else. It's terrifying, isn't it? It feels like everyone is trying to erase where you came from.

FRANK

They are. Richard wants to throw everything away. He threw away my dad's blanket. He wants me to forget.

RICHARD 4

That's so unfair to you. Your dad loved you very much. And Sandy the mailman sounds like he was a wonderful man. You keeping his memory alive? That's a beautiful thing. You have such a special heart.

FRANK

Everyone else thinks I'm a freak. They think it's morbid. But I just don't want the world to forget Sandy. If no one remembers, it's like he never walked in the rain at all.

RICHARD 4

You're not a freak. You're a protector. You're keeping the history of the world safe right here in this suitcase. What else is in there, buddy? You can tell me. I care. I really do.

FRANK

There's a pair of spectacles from an old lady named Eunice. She used them to look at the stars. And there's a pocket watch that stopped at exactly 4:43. I just wanted to keep them together. I wanted them to have a home.

RICHARD 4

That's so beautiful. You've carried this heavy thing for so long. You must be so, so tired. Why don't you let me hold it for a minute? Just to give your arms a little rest. I'll keep it safe right here between us. I promise.

FRANK

My arms are a little tired from holding on.

RICHARD 4

Then let go. You can trust me.

FRANK

Thank you.

(He hands over the suitcase. The second after he does, RICHARD 4 spins his mask around and on the other side is the face of the Devil. He laughs uproariously.)

RICHARD 4

Target acquired! Item secured! Thank you for your cooperation. Total liquidation of assets will begin immediately!

(FRANK scrambles to his feet, his face twisting in absolute horror.)

FRANK

No! You promised! You said you cared! Give it back!

RICHARD 4

Caring is for suckers. Thank you for clicking!

FRANK

Give it back! Give it back to me!

(A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 5

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 5 enters, wearing a handsome mask with a chiselled jawline. He's a debonair ladies man. He grabs the suitcase.)

RICHARD 5

Yeah. That's right. The upgrade has arrived, Frank. Look at this thing. It's vintage. The ladies love vintage. But we gotta spruce it up. It's a little dry. Needs some leather oil. Needs a little passion.

FRANK

Don't touch that. Please put it down.

RICHARD 5

Relax, kiddo. You're talking to a professional. Your mom knows it. Why do you think we're in the new house? Because I'm a closer. I close deals. And I close doors on the past. Let's see what kind of game you're running in here. Let's see, let's see.

(He opens the suitcase and inspects the contents.)

Regular old paperwork? Boring.

FRANK

Those are Sandy's! Those are letters from his sister in France! Stop it!

RICHARD 5

Oh, hello. What are these? Grandma glasses? Very retro. Very chic. I know a girl named Dottie at work who wears glasses just like these to look smart. And this. This is quite a timepiece. Chicks dig a guy with a snazzy watch. Let's see if it runs.

(He listens to the watch.)

It's dead. Stuck at 4:43. That's a loser time. 4:43 is when the bar closes and everyone goes home alone. You gotta live in the now, baby. The future is a digital smartwatch that tells you how many steps you took while you were cheating on your diet. This thing? Garbage.

FRANK

Stop it! Give that back to me! Give everything back!

(A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 6

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 6 enters, wearing a mask with giant eyeballs popping out of it. He's a total madman. He snatches the pocket watch and the spectacles and starts to juggle them.)

RICHARD 6

Woo! Yeah! Faster, Frank! Faster! We're moving up in the world! No brakes! No rear view mirror! Look at us go!

FRANK

Be careful! You're going to break them!

RICHARD 6

No time to be careful! If you hesitate, you crash! We're living life on the edge now! Extreme living! Out with the old, in with the new! You like old stuff? Let's see how strong it is! Let's crash test your life! Don't be a baby! Let's break the mold! Let's see what you're made of under that ugly old jacket!

(He picks up the suitcase and flings it into the air, then catches it. FRANK grips the suitcase from the other side and they engage in a violent tug of war.)

FRANK

No! Stop! Please!

(A voice echoes offstage.)

RICHARD 7

(Offstage)

CLICK!

(RICHARD 7 enters, wearing a mask with no eyes, no nose, and just a thin line for a mouth. He drags a large barrel behind him and slams it down. He rips the suitcase from the RICHARD 6 and begins dumping the spectacles,

the pocket watch, the old letters, the hat,
and eventually the suitcase itself, into the
barrel one by one as he speaks.)

RICHARD 7

It's gone, Frank. It's all gone. There's no Sandy. There's no Eunice.
There's no dad. There's just me. And the new truck. And the new
house.

(He pulls a flashlight out of his pocket and
shines it directly in FRANK'S face.)

And I've got the match to set your past on fire.

FRANK

(Screams)

Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

END OF PREVIEW

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