

DOWN LINE

A comedy in one act
by
Bradley Hayward

PREVIEW ONLY!

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SYNOPSIS

At a neighbourhood yard sale, Vera and Frank connect over their chaotic home lives, driven by her mother's multi-level marketing obsession and his fixation on vintage clothing. While trying on old clothes, they help each other flip a pile of junk into a plan for the future.

CHARACTERS

(1M + 1F)

FRANK.....Quirky & nostalgic, male, 13.

VERA.....Unsure & sarcastic, female, 13.

SETTING

A neighbourhood yard sale.

RUNNING TIME

10 minutes.

(AT RISE: A neighbourhood yard sale. There's a clothing rack stuffed with vintage garments center stage. FRANK enthusiastically sorts through the rack while VERA stands beside him, looking completely overwhelmed by life. FRANK holds up an ugly suede vest, with fringe dangling from the sleeves.)

FRANK

Vera, look at this. Look at the craftsmanship. This isn't just fabric, it's a time capsule.

VERA

It smells.

FRANK

Exactly! It has *provenance*.

VERA

That's a big word.

FRANK

It means origin.

VERA

Are you sure it doesn't mean ugly?

FRANK

I'm telling you, whoever owned this vest definitely drove a station wagon with fake wood panelling.

VERA

We've been friends for exactly four weeks, and most of our hangs have been spent at yard sales. Is this what kids do where you used to live?

FRANK

Where I used to live, history was boring because it stayed in textbooks. I prefer history I can reach out and touch.

VERA

(Inspects a floral housecoat)

I don't know...

FRANK

Don't know what?

VERA

Digging through the clothes of dead people? It feels a little dark.

FRANK

It's not dark, it's beautiful.

VERA

You think this housecoat is beautiful? It has holes in it.

FRANK

Think about it. We're thirteen. We have no idea who we're going to be yet. But these clothes? They already finished their stories. I'm just archiving them.

VERA

That's another big word.

FRANK

Archiving means to collect something.

VERA

I know what it means! I just don't like it!

FRANK

Why does it bother you?

VERA

Because my house is currently being archived against its will.

FRANK

And what does that mean?

VERA

You know how you've never been over to my place? And every time you ask, I make up an excuse like "oh, my dog has emotional issues" or "we're fumigating for termites"?

FRANK

I did find the termite excuse pretty specific.

VERA

It's not termites. And I don't even have a dog. It's inventory, Frank. My bedroom is no longer a bedroom. It is a fulfillment center for Luvora Global Enterprises.

FRANK

Is that a sci-fi movie?

VERA

I wish. Luvora is luxury hair care company. My mom got recruited to "work" there six months ago.

FRANK

Is it a good job?

VERA

(Laughs)

No! She has a fancy title, but it's a trap. She loves to tell people that Luvora is a combination of "luxe" and "aura," which is hilarious because her aura is financial ruin.

FRANK

Is everything okay?

VERA

(Shakes her head)

We're losing the house. I found a letter from the bank with a giant red stamp on it. We have thirty days or we're out on the street.

FRANK

Wait, really? Just from shampoo?

VERA

She doesn't even sell it! To stay in the group, she buys thousands of dollars of inventory for herself every month. Her savings are totally gone. My bed is literally propped up on boxes of Miracle Root Serum. If I roll over at night, I trigger a landslide of lavender scented conditioner.

FRANK

Wow. That's a lot of hygiene.

VERA

It's a scam! And the worst part? The products make your hair fall out! It's a known side effect they call the "purging phase," but my mom has been purging since April. She's nearly bald. She walks around the house wearing a sequined beret, filming TikToks about financial freedom, then cries when the camera turns off. I'm looking at apartment listings on my phone during history class. I feel like I'm sliding down the side of pyramid, with no solid ground beneath me.

(FRANK takes a heavy wool trench coat off the rack and drapes it over her shoulders.)

FRANK

Here.

VERA

What are you doing? It's hot out.

FRANK

It's an anchor. Put your hands in the pockets.

(VERA puts her hands in the pockets, looking confused.)

Feel that? That's 1960s wool. It survived the Cold War, the moon landing, and probably a really bad flood in someone's basement. It's not going anywhere. And neither are you.

VERA

(Voice softens)

Are you always this weirdly comforting?

FRANK

Maybe. To me, this isn't just a pile of old junk. It's evidence. Every single thing at this yard sale is proof that someone went through a storm, came out the other side, and outgrew the clothes they wore while it was raining.

VERA

So you think people keep moving forward? No matter how messy it gets?

FRANK

(Completely sincere)

Always.

VERA

Even the bald moms?

FRANK

Especially the bald moms. My mom did the exact same thing.

VERA

She went bald?

FRANK

No. The panic. The hiding letters. The sudden loss of everything you thought was safe. After my dad died two years ago, the bills piled up and we lost our house.

VERA

(Stunned)

You did?

FRANK

Yeah. That's why we moved here. For a fresh start with my "new" dad. Richard has a great job, and he bought us this giant house where everything smells like fresh drywall. Richard hates anything old. He throws out my things if they look slightly worn and tells me to focus on the future. This morning he asked about my five year financial plan while I was eating Fruit Loops.

VERA

That sounds intense.

FRANK

It feels like I'm being erased. Like my whole past is a mistake that needs to be scrubbed away by a guy who only wears brand new polo shirts. That's why I'm obsessed with this stuff.

(He yanks a 1980s power blazer with huge shoulder pads off the rack and holds it up to himself.)

Look at these 1988 shoulder pads, Vera! This jacket says, "I own a fax machine and I'm not afraid to use it."

VERA

What's a fax machine?

FRANK

Lesson for another day. The point is, the woman who wore this probably went through a million heartbreaks, but still woke up and tried to look her best.

(He tosses the blazer aside and grabs a psychedelic 1970s polyester shirt, with a loud print and huge collar.)

Or look at this one. Pure 1973 energy. This guy definitely read tarot cards and believed in the power of a lava lamp. If these clothes can survive fifty years of chaos, I can survive a new stepdad. And you can survive a bank letter.

VERA

My mom would love the one with the shoulder pads. She's always looking for a magic trick to fix her life.

FRANK

Really?

VERA

This isn't even her first "thing." It's just the first one that cost money. Last year, she said she wanted us to experience community. So she dragged me to this chapel she stumbled across on Facebook. She bought a whole new wardrobe of Sunday dresses, and we actually went for a few weeks.

FRANK

That doesn't sound too bad.

VERA

It wasn't a church. I mean, it used to be, but it got bought out. It was a wellness boot camp. We sat in pews while this guy in a tracksuit did squats and screamed into a headset about "purging our inner toxins." My mom cheered because she thought the burning in her thighs was a spiritual awakening.

FRANK

Whoa.

VERA

It was a cult!

FRANK

That's why I said "whoa."

VERA

She just wants to belong. She's desperate for someone to tell her she's doing a good job. When her high school bestie reached out and offered her a "sisterhood of entrepreneurs," she didn't see a scam. She saw a lifeline. Something that couldn't be taken away from us. And now it's taking away the house.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

VERA

I don't want to move. I love my room. Even with the shampoo boxes.

FRANK

It's all about the downline.

VERA

The what?

FRANK

The downline. The people below you.

VERA

Oh, that. In Luvora, your downline is just the people you suckered into buying crappy shampoo.

FRANK

Right. But look at this rack. This is a vintage downline.

VERA

A vintage downline?

FRANK

Think about it. 1950s leather jacket gets passed down to the hippie son in the 70s.

VERA

Who stains it with mustard at a concert.

FRANK

Then it goes down the line to his little sister in the 80s.

VERA

Who chops off the sleeves and adds safety pins.

FRANK

Boom. Downline. Every generation passes fabric down the line to the next person recruited into the family.

VERA

Except in a family downline, you don't get a dumb corporate title.

FRANK

No, you get a jacket that's too big.

VERA

And instead of financial freedom --

FRANK

You get a free wardrobe.

VERA

My mom's downline has her sister and one of Dad's ex-girlfriends in it.

FRANK

My downline has a high school quarterback from the 90s, a disco dancer, and a guy named Lyle who wore a lot of tweed.

VERA

Yours sounds cooler.

FRANK

Mine doesn't charge a sign-up fee.

VERA

And the products actually work.

FRANK

The wool keeps you warm and the denim doesn't make you bald.

VERA

So you're saying clothes are the real pyramid scheme?

FRANK

I'm saying history is the only pyramid where the bottom tier actually supports you.

VERA

I like that.

FRANK

Then we fight for the next generation. Starting right now.

END OF PREVIEW

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