

“Vanilla”

By Gerard Dunning

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With thanks to the many Directors and Actors for their guidance.

At a Saturday open home, real estate is less about bricks and mortar and more about smoke and mirrors. Chad, a slick agent with too much cologne and too much to say, is determined to sell a dream, whether or not the house can deliver it. By his side is Lola, his glamorous assistant who's far more interested in her own side hustle than helping him, though her biting asides reveal more than Chad would ever want the buyers to hear.

When a young couple steps through the door, one already planning the nursery, the other checking the sturdiness of the walls, Chad's well-rehearsed routine begins to wobble. Between the forced charm, the awkward truths, and a certain oversized “homely touch,” the question isn't just whether the house will sell, but whether anyone will ever see real estate agents the same way again.

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Vanilla

A one-act play in five scenes

Setting

A stylish but obviously staged suburban open home. Saturday afternoon. The living room is sparsely furnished with generic showroom items.

Characters

Chadwick “Chad” Langford: (Male, mid-40s) A real estate agent who thrives on appearances and performance. Chad is slick on the surface but cracks easily under pressure. He’s all bravado, overconfident in his cheap suits and overpowering cologne, believing every word he says is gold, even when it’s nonsense. He can charm buyers with a dazzling grin one moment, then snap at his assistant the next. There’s a faint whiff of desperation behind the sales pitch, hinting at someone clinging to an image that’s already slipping.

Lola DeVine: (Female, early 20s) Tall, blonde, and striking, Lola is Chad’s assistant, at least on paper. To her parents, she has a respectable job, but her real energy is poured into her OnlyFans page, where she controls the gaze that Chad so clumsily exploits. Lola is sharp, sarcastic, and utterly unimpressed with Chad’s routine. She knows she’s only there as window dressing to make him look good, and she’s not afraid to let him know it in biting asides. Her occasional inner monologues (to the audience) expose the absurdity of Chad’s tactics, adding wit and bite to the comedy.

Maya Parker: (Female, late 20s) Pregnant and glowing with excitement, Maya is looking for the perfect family home. Her focus is on nurseries, storage space, and everything “baby-ready.” She’s optimistic and easy to charm, often swept up in Chad’s patter, and sometimes too distracted to notice the cracks beneath the surface. Maya represents the dream of domestic bliss, though her tunnel vision leaves her somewhat oblivious to her partner’s more grounded concerns.

Evan Parker: (Male, mid 30s) Practical, serious, and slightly awkward, Evan is less interested in “vibes” and more interested in structural integrity. He’s quick to mention that his father, a seasoned builder, is the real authority who will have the final say. This undermines both Maya and Chad, and unintentionally heightens the comedy. While Maya dreams of paint swatches and cots, Evan talks load-bearing walls and drainage. He’s earnest but a little blinkered, and his insistence on involving Dad highlights both his lack of independence and the couple’s disconnect.

Author's Note

Vanilla is a comedy about real estate... but really, it's about the theatre of selling. Anyone who's ever wandered through an open home knows the little tricks: the lighting just right, a cake cooling on the bench, the faint whiff of something "homely" in the air. Beneath the polish is performance, and beneath that, often, desperation.

Chad, our agent, is a man whose livelihood depends entirely on how well he can perform a version of himself that people want to believe in. Lola, his assistant, sees through the façade and narrates the absurdity with biting honesty. Together they create a push-pull dynamic that is both uncomfortable and hilarious, an exaggerated mirror of the way appearances are manipulated in everyday life.

Vanilla is a reminder that comedy is often hiding in plain sight. We laugh because we recognise the desperation to impress, the awkwardness of relationships strained under appearances, and the little performances we all stage, sometimes for others, sometimes just for ourselves.

I invite you to enjoy the humour, but also to notice the cracks in the walls, and to wonder, just for a moment, what's really being sold.

Scene 1 – The Candle & the Call

(Lights up on a sterile living room staged for sale. A large scented candle sits prominently on the coffee table with brochures. Chad paces with his mobile phone, gesturing too dramatically. Lola enters quietly with tote bag and clipboard)

Chad: *(into phone, sharp)*

Trevor! Don't... don't you dare tell me the photos were "fine." Shadows are never fine. Shadows are death. They're the termites of presentation. They chew through value. Buyers walk in, they see a shadow, they walk straight back out. *(beat)* I don't care if it's a three-million-dollar listing or a one-bed rental in bloody Gosford *(replace place name as necessary)*, light sells. Light!

(He gestures toward the ceiling as if commanding the heavens. Lola pauses, watches, unimpressed)

Lola: *(inner monologue, sarcastic)*

Saturday. Home number three. Routine. Chad's on the phone pretending to be God's gift to real estate, and I'm here to make sure he doesn't tank the sale... or collapse without his star attraction...

Chad: *(continuing onto the phone)*

Listen, Trevor... when a buyer steps into a property, they don't see walls and paint. They see... their future. Their birthdays. Their Christmases. Their marriages. Their divorces. Their golden retriever that pisses on the new carpet. *That* is what we're selling. A dream. And Trevor, my boy, you're not a photographer. You're a dream merchant.

Lola: *(flat, aside, continuing)*

I'm the overpriced garnish on this stale buffet.

Chad: *(snapping into phone)*

I don't want to hear about your cat, Trevor! This isn't about your bloody cat, it's about *my listing!*

(He hangs up dramatically. Sighs. Straightens tie. Notices Lola watching)

Chad:

Hallway's too dark. Fix it.

Lola: *(dry)*

Sure. I'll go grab the industrial floodlight.

(Chad ignores her, turns grandly to the candle. Lifts it as though sacred.)

Chad:

Now... ambiance. The atmosphere. This is... the magic.

(He pulls a lighter, fumbles. Flame sputters, goes out. He mutters curses. Lola stares, arms crossed.)

Lola: *(inner monologue)*

Magic. That's code for "I don't actually know anything about homes, but I can fake it with a vanilla candle." This is what I went to Uni for. A man wrestling a wick.

(Finally lights it. Sets it proudly.)

Chad:

There. Perfect. Now the house smells... like home.

Lola: *(low)*

More like scented desperation.

Chad: *(snaps at Lola, low voice)*

Enough. You just stand there and look the part. That's why you're here.

Lola: *(sharp response to Chad, biting)*

Oh, I know why I'm here. To make you look credible. To keep my parents happy. To be the trophy blonde next to the cheap suit.

(Beat – Chad checks his breath and takes a good look around the room in silence)

Lola: *(commentating on Chad's antics, inner monologue)*

And here comes the "obnoxious pause." You know, when he wants you to think he's deep in thought but really he's deciding which cologne to assault the buyers with today.

Chad:

Sort those brochures out. The guests need to *see* our dedication! And light those lights... it's too moody in here. *(He leans in, lower, leering)*

Saw your little side-hustle on Only Fans *(replace reference as necessary)*. Interesting *(mocking laugh)* Entertaining.

(Lola fixes the brochures and turns on the lights)

Lola: *(inner monologue, flat, with venom)*

Four open homes today. One candle. Four chances to survive his personality. And now he drops the side-hustle line. *(beat, dry)* Really? Did he think that'd impress me? Or scare me? Either way... what a total try-hard.

(Beat. Doorbell rings. Chad jolts, checks his reflection in the window, adjusts tie proudly. Lola doesn't move)

Chad: *(low, snapping at Lola)*

Showtime! Smile. But not too much. *(scathing)* You look cheap when you smile.

Lola: *(flat, deadly)*

So do you.

(Chad plasters grin, flings open the door.)

Chad: *(booming)*

Welcome! Chad... Chad Langford. We spoke on the phone. Evan... Maya... Welcome! Come in...

(Enter Evan and Maya. Chad shakes Evan's hand with vigour, and with a hand on her back guides Maya into the living room)

Scene 2 – The Buyers Arrive

(Chad launches into salesman mode. Evan looks around eagerly. Maya heads straight for the kitchen)

Chad:

Four-bedroom family home! Full reno. Top to bottom... reborn. *(pointing out some non-existent features in the bare room)* Lovely space for family dinners... Perfect spot for a bit of morning yoga. North facing, all-day sun.

(Chad continues to point out features with Maya and Evan)

Lola: *(inner monologue)*

“North facing?” It’s facing south you idiot! And yeah... “Morning yoga in the sunroom.” Jesus! Because that’s exactly what people think when they buy a house, not “how are we going to pay the mortgage.”

Evan: *(impressed)*

Yeah, nice! Dad’ll love this layout. Dad’s got an eye, you know? He built half the bloody houses in our street. He’s a total legend with foundations.

Lola: *(aside)*

And here begins the gospel according to Saint Dad.

Maya: *(from kitchen, absent)*

Where’s the pantry? I need to see if it fits the formula tins.

Chad: *(ignoring her, to Evan)*

Spacious. Open-plan. Perfect for entertaining. Imagine Christmas here. The whole family. The laughter. The smell of turkey. The sound of Dad approving of every brick.

Evan: *(grinning)*

Yeah! Exactly! Dad’ll know if it’s solid. He can hear a dodgy joist from a mile away.

Lola: *(snaps)*

Does Dad also tuck you in at night?

(Evan laughs awkwardly. Chad glares at her)

Evan: *(examining window frames)*

Solid walls... structurally sound?

Chad: *(grandly)*

Solid as the day is long. Though these walls do have stories...

Lola: *(inner monologue as she hands Evan the standard building report)*

Translation: "We've got the building inspector on our payroll. If he wants to keep his contract the building reports will have no issues with our listings"

(Maya re-enters)

Maya:

Does the laundry fit a pram?

Chad:

Ah, excellent question. And yes... it's *flexible*. Very flexible. Multi-functional. A laundry-slash-pram storage-slash-home gym if you like!

Lola: *(aside, flat)*

It's a cupboard with a sink.

Scene 3 – Cracks in the Show

(Chad hovers near Maya, trying to sell her a dream)

Chad:

Picture it... baby's first steps across this very living room. The natural light pouring in. The scent of fresh paint, new beginnings.

Maya: *(cutting in, flat)*

Where does the cot go?

Chad: *(hesitates, recovers)*

Ah! Well, versatile bedrooms. Spacious. Flexible. You could have a cot, a play area, a study nook, a...

Lola: *(snapping, bored)*

Or you could just admit it's tiny.

Chad: *(hissing, low to her)*

Don't. Start.

Lola: *(turns away slightly, inner monologue)*

Why not... it's all theatre anyway. He parades through the rooms like he owns the story, and I'm the blonde ornament rolled out to sell the illusion. Third house today... the candle's still burning, the same rehearsed charm being poured over the same hopeful couple, pretending they can step into someone else's dream. And it'll end the same way it always does... passed in, reserve too high. So I nod, smile, play the part. Sharp, rolling with it, or just another dumb blonde? Meh... whatever.

(Beat - Chad glares. She smirks faintly. Evan breaks the tension)

Evan:

Look, it's decent. But Dad'll want to check the beams. He always checks the beams.

Lola: *(aside)*

Jesus Christ, build the man a shrine already.

Scene 4 – The Undercut

(Chad regroups, goes on the attack, but with slippery charm)

Chad:

Now listen... this place won't sit around. We've already had strong interest... young couples just like yourselves, investors sniffing for a quick flip, even a cash buyer circling who could drop a deposit this afternoon. Properties in this pocket? They move fast, no question. And once it's gone, it's gone. There's no second chance, no twin down the road with this kind of aspect, this kind of light. If you hesitate, you'll lose it. Happens every weekend — good people stand where you're standing, and by Monday? Someone else is moving in. *(beat, leaning in with a grin)* And trust me... the only regret in this market is the offer you didn't make.

(There is an exchange of looks between Chad, Evan and Maya as Chad tries to close the deal with all the charm he can muster)

So, Evan... why don't we save the back-and-forth and put something in writing today? A strong offer on the table now means this place is yours before anyone else even gets a look in

Evan: *(defensive)*

Well, we don't make moves without Dad taking a look.

Maya: *(flat)*

And without checking if the car fits in the carport and we can get the baby in and out ok.

Chad:

Carport? My dear... it's not a carport. It's a *vehicular sanctuary*.

Lola: *(snorts, mutters)*

It's a slab of concrete with a pole.

(Chad shoots her a deadly look. She smirks.)

Lola: *(continues, aside, inner monologue)*

“Vehicular sanctuary,” he calls it. The brochure even says “ample multi-purpose parking space”... a phrase so wide it could hide a circus. Between us, the inspector didn’t exactly squint too hard before ticking the box for “two-car carport.” Truth is, you’d struggle to wedge a hatchback in without scraping the walls. Forget your gym, your workshop, or a pram. But hey, wording is everything in real estate. It’s all suggestion, innuendo, and just enough optimism to make you second-guess your own eyes.

Scene 5 – Collapse

(The tension is now thick. Maya has had enough. Evan dithers. Chad spirals. Lola sharpens)

Maya: *(to Evan, but overheard by everyone. Firm, exasperated, almost lecturing)*

I don't know... it's just... I keep trying to picture the baby here. The cot in the corner, little clothes folded away somewhere, the late-night pacing when she won't sleep. And I can almost see it... but the rooms feel tight, like the walls are pushing back. Everything looks so perfect... like a catalogue... but I'm not sure where our mess would go. Maybe it's just me overthinking, but... *(pause)* Maybe we just need to keep looking. Or maybe... *(uncertain)* we'll find a way to make it work.

Evan: *(awkward)*

Maybe Dad'll...

Maya: *(snaps)*

Dad isn't going to live here. I will. With our baby. And there's nowhere to put the cot.

(Beat. Silence. Chad flounders.)

Chad:

But... *(points to the candle)* the ambiance... the...

Lola: *(cuts him, deadly sharp)*

Reeks of crap, Chad.

(Beat - Everyone freezes. Chad's mask slips. He looks at her, almost wounded)

Evan: *(awkward, dragging Maya)*

We'll... we'll think about it. I'll get Dad to take a look.

(Chad shakes Evan's hand firmly, gives Evan his card and sees Evan and Maya to the door, hand around Maya, milking every opportunity. Adlibbed dialogue fades. Lola stares. The candle flickers)

(Chad re-enters, ignoring Lola. He resets and continues his routine, looking for anyone else coming up the driveway, checking his suit, breath, watch, phone, the rooms, the brochures, etc)

Lola: *(to audience, dry)*

Third inspection in a row. Same script. Same candle. Same ringmaster. *(beat)* And in thirty minutes? Another house. Another circus. The scent of vanilla... at first it's sweet, cozy, almost like it belongs. But after hours of fake smiles, recycled lines, and over-the-top charm, it starts to smell... wrong. Sickly sweet, heavy, and soaked in bullshit.

But here's the thing, and I'll let you in on a secret, the show doesn't end when the door closes. By dusk, the blow-dried, cologne-soaked champions of success are lined up in bars, toasting deals they didn't make, dragging some willing accessory along to keep up appearances, pretending the magic lasts past the open home.

I don't care. I'm along for the ride, watching the spin, knowing the likes of them will be drooling over me later, online, still convinced they're calling the shots. And yes... he'll be paying for my drinks tonight.

*(She blows out the candle - **Blackout**)*