

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: Catacomb-like quarters the vampires call home.

AT RISE: The stage is almost dark. A wolf howls. Bat wings flutter overhead. Moving clouds reveal a full moon streaming through a window illuminating some box-like coffins. We hear a sneeze followed by the creaking sound of rusty hinges. As the lid opens, light spills onto the stage, emanating from the coffin. The wolf howls again. A small furry animal scurries furtively from left to right.

VLADIMIR enters, carrying a limp body. He looks cautiously about, making sure he has not been followed. The object in his arms moans. He starts to place it in one of the coffins. It is occupied. Annoyed, he moves to another. It too has an occupant. He moves to a third coffin and finds it full.

VLADIMIR

What is this? Grand Central Station?

(He finds a spot and dumps the body. A second sneeze is heard. VANGELA rises from the lighted coffin. She wears a soft, flowing, filmy white dress.)

VANGELA

(Speaks with a stopped up nose.)

This mildew!

(Another sneeze.)

VANGELA (Continued)

And the dust! You'd think that at least once this century they would have vacuumed this bone-box! I've got to have a new coffin.

VLADIMIR

You are making too much noise. You sound like the lovelorn call of a Transylvanian werewolf.

VANGELA

I can't help sneezing. It's this mold and dust. I need a new coffin.

(She sneezes again.)

VLADIMIR

You must stop these explosive sounds. Where is Verlene?

VANGELA

I thought when I became a vampire, that was it. Wham. Three bites and I'm queen of the night. But no. I'm hemmed in with rules. And a nursemaid. This is a nightmare.

VLADIMIR

We do not have nightmares. We give them. But you have not answered me. Where is your tutor? Where is Verlene?

(Calls into the wings.)

Verlene!

(Gets no reply.)

Verlene!

VANGELA

I think she and a couple of the other instructors went out for a drink. Or maybe a bite or two.

(VANGELA sneezes again. The small furry animal scurries back across the stage.)

VLADIMIR

Do not try me. I am not a patient man.

(Another sneeze from VANGELA.)

This bombastic sneezing could draw a crowd.

(VANGELA sneezes again.)

VOICE FROM OFF-STAGE

Hey! Keep it down in there. I'm trying to sleep!

VLADIMIR

More sneezing and he comes to investigate. Then the curious, with nothing else to occupy their miserable little lives, join him. Soon we have a multitude prying into our affairs.

VANGELA

(Sneezes again.)

I can't help it. Sneezing is a reflex. My allergist said so.

VLADIMIR

Allergist, smallergist. It is all in your mind.

(Someone in the back of the audience sneezes.)

You are trying my patience with this noise.

VANGELA

That wasn't me that time.

(VERLENE has entered unnoticed by VLADIMIR and VANGELA.)

VERLENE

I could have told you that.

(Points to the back of the audience.)

It was someone out there.

VANGELA

Sneezing also makes me feel weak.

VERLENE

I could have told you that.

VLADIMIR

And why didn't you?

VERLENE

(Shrugs.)

Not part of my job description.

VLADIMIR

The weakness comes from lack of blood. You're experiencing the common vampire malady: anemia. You need to drink something. Something red and warm.

(VLADIMIR calls into the wings.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

Renfield!

(RENFIELD half runs on stage, approaching VLADIMIR from behind.)

RENFIELD

Yes, master.

VLADIMIR

Renfield! Where are you?

RENFIELD

Here, master.

VLADIMIR

Oh, there you are.

(RENFIELD looks at the body VLADIMIR brought in. He speaks in an approving tone.)

RENFIELD

Oh, master. Is she ... another ... ward?

VLADIMIR

Not yet, Renfield. But I couldn't just leave her crumpled up in the street.

VERLENE

Hardly. You've already gotten two tickets this month for littering.

RENFIELD (eagerly)

She's a between-meal pick-me-up?

VLADIMIR

In time, perhaps. But she barely had enough blood in her for my two a.m. snack. However, Miss Vangela is feeling faint. She needs ...

RENFIELD

Say no more, master. At once.

(RENFIELD goes into a search mode, looking here and there on stage. He discovers a beetle, grabs it and eats it.)

VLADIMIR

(He is paying attention to VANGELA, not RENFIELD.)

Remember, Renfield ...

RENFIELD

(Resuming his search.)

I know, master. Body temperature. To avoid shock.

(The furry animal scurries across the stage once more. RENFIELD pounces on it and starts to bite it.)

VLADIMIR

No, Renfield! No! Renfield!

(RENFIELD cowers. He is torn between keeping the furry thing for himself and yielding it to VLADIMIR.)

RENFIELD

Yes, master?

VLADIMIR

It is for Vangela. She is about to swoon.

RENFIELD

Yes, master.

(RENFIELD gives VLADIMIR the animal.)

VLADIMIR

(Holding the creature out to VANGELA.)

Here, my dear. Sup. You'll feel so much better!

VANGELA

(Shrinking from the thing.)

Ugh! I couldn't.

VLADIMIR

Of course you can. Think of it as the container for your warm dinner.... Here, I'll help you.

VANGELA

What is it?

VLADIMIR

Don't worry about what it is. Drink!

VANGELA

Ugh! I can't. The fur will get stuck in my teeth!

VERLENE

Get the kid something with a hairless neck.

VLADIMIR

You cannot expect that from Renfield. Vultures and people are difficult to find on short notice.

VANGELA

Don't you have any glasses? Waterford crystal, maybe? Even an old jelly jar glass.

VLADIMIR

Squeamishness does not serve you here. Drink.

VERLENE

Maybe she could use a straw.

VLADIMIR (exasperated)

Enough of this shilly-shally.

(VANGELA reluctantly takes the animal. As she opens her mouth to bite it, VLADIMIR raises his cape in a way that hides VANGELA from the audience.)

VANGELA

Aaagh!

VLADIMIR

You protest too much. In the old days of famines, we were happy to find rats and moles. We did what we had to do to keep the vampire tradition from disappearing.

(VLADIMIR lowers his cape, revealing that the front of VANGELA's dress is bloody.)

VANGELA

Ooh! Look at this mess. This is the third dress I've ruined this week!

VERLENE

Yeah, and protein stains are hell to get out.

VLADIMIR

(Takes the animal from VANGELA and pushes her aside.)

What a disgusting display. Such inept technique. You have more on your clothes than in your body. Watch carefully. Note how I sink my teeth into the neck, just so. How I draw the blood into my system.

(VLADIMIR makes nuzzling and sucking sounds as he drinks from the little animal. VANGELA watches closely.)

VANGELA

You have drunk it all!

VERLENE

I could have told you that.

(VANGELA begins tentatively taking drops of blood from her dress with a forefinger, then licking the finger.)

VLADIMIR

I see now why you are anemic.

VERLENE

Yeah. She's wearing it instead of drinking it.

(VANGELA continues to scrape drops of blood from her dress.)

VANGELA

Umm. It's salty.

VLADIMIR

What am I to do with you? A vampire who's allergic to dust and mold. A vampire who gets more blood on her than in her.

(VLADIMIR notices the light coming from VANGELA's coffin.)

Renfield! Put out that light. No one should keep lights in coffins. Think of the fire hazard.

RENFIELD

Yes, master.

VANGELA (startled)

Who put out the light? I have to have a night-light! I can't stand the dark!

VLADIMIR

This is not possible. A vampire who is afraid of the dark.

VERLENE

It's mind blowing all right.

(A beeping sound emerges from VANGELA's coffin. RENFIELD, attracted by the sound, scurries to the coffin and looks inside.)

RENFIELD

What is that sound? A new breed of cricket?

(VANGELA takes a laptop computer out of her coffin. She positions it on top of the open lid. RENFIELD looks at the laptop as if it might be something to eat.)

VANGELA

Hey, I got a hit!

(She proceeds to type at the keyboard.)

VLADIMIR

What is this box? What are you doing?

VANGELA

I'm answering my e-mail.

VLADIMIR

Nonsense. The postal service does not deliver mail to coffins. I've had that problem since the days of the Pony Express.

VANGELA

No, no. The internet. The web. You know, cyberspace.

VLADIMIR

Spider-space? Web?

(He looks into her coffin.)

I see no web.

VANGELA

Not spider -- cyber. The World Wide Web.

VLADIMIR

A world-wide web? Your imagination shows promise. A world-wide web ... beautiful concept ... do you think if I worked at it I could be such a spider?

VANGELA

Forget I said "web." Just think of it as a way to get information. Look! I've found a place that specializes in custom coffins!

VLADIMIR

(Both intrigued and suspicious.)

Custom coffins. Quaint.

VANGELA

They say, "Anything from aardvarks to zithers. If you want to be buried in it, we'll make it. Vampire models our speciality." Vlady! It's the solution to my problem! I'll order a coffin that is allergen-free and equipped with eternal light!

VERLENE

Just what every vampire needs.

VANGELA

Oh, look, Vlady. Here's the coffin maker's picture. Isn't he handsome!

VLADIMIR

(Looking at the laptop screen.)

Hmmm. A vaguely familiar countenance.

VERLENE

Yeah. He looks like that old movie-star dog, Lassie.

VANGELA

He's gorgeous. And he is in the specialty-coffin business. Vlady, I think I'm in love.

VLADIMIR

Lah-ve! Lah-ve! Don't mention this word to me. It makes me ... miserable.

VANGELA

But look at those eyes. That brow. And dimples! I'm a pushover for dimples.

VERLENE

Looks to me like he's wearing a rug.

VLADIMIR

(Drifting into a reverie.)

Love is agony and trouble. I loved a Bavarian princess in ... in ... Renfield ...?

RENFIELD

In 1528, master.

VLADIMIR

Yes, in 1528 ... she was beautiful beyond compare.

(He shudders and shakes his head.)

She ended up with a stake through her heart ... and then there was ...

VERLENE

Now see what you've done! It's a mistake to get him started on his lost loves. He loses his grip on reality.

(To VANGELA.)

And whatever you do, never mention Voluptua in front of him.

VANGELA

Voluptua? What's a Voluptua?

VERLENE

You don't want to know. Forget that name.

VANGELA

(A bit annoyed with VERLENE's manner.)
Okay, okay. You don't have to get snippy about it.
Hey, Vlady! Snap out of it! Come back to the here and
now!

VLADIMIR

What? What?

VANGELA

We're discussing a new coffin.

VLADIMIR

Out of the question.

VANGELA

But dead people have been using this coffin for ages.
(She shudders.)

VLADIMIR

We do not use that term among ourselves.

VANGELA

Okay, casket, then.

VERLENE

He means "dead." We do not use the term "dead."

VLADIMIR

It is not a pretty word.

VANGELA

But I need a clean, dust-free, sleeping place.

VLADIMIR

I've already said "no." Why did I ever agree to
sponsor you?

VANGELA

I didn't ask to become a vampire!
(Sneezes.)

VLADIMIR

(Upset, turns to VERLENE.)
You see, she loves to annoy me. What am I to do with
her?

VERLENE

Wait'll she finds your Swiss Bank line of credit on that fancy box she carries around. You'll be wasted.

VLADIMIR

You knew she diddled this thing? And you didn't tell me?

VERLENE

It's not part of my ...

VLADIMIR

Don't even bother saying it.

VERLENE

I think that box told her about the scandal concerning the baroness' disappearance. And those charges of turning the minister into a werewolf.

VLADIMIR

How could that be? We hushed up that gossip centuries ago. What am I to do with this creature?

VERLENE

It's not part of my job description, but ... maybe you should humor her. Pretend you're checking out those coffins. Just 'til you figure out what you're going to do about her.

VLADIMIR

A very good idea. Although a better one might be doing away with her!

VERLENE

Ha! Easy for you to say. I will join you later.

(VERLENE exits.)

VLADIMIR

Vangela, my dear.

VANGELA

Yes, Vlady?

VLADIMIR

I have reconsidered my decision. We'll look at the caskets.

VANGELA

I knew you'd understand.

VLADIMIR

But you cannot appear in public in such a disreputable condition. Look at you. Renfield!

RENFIELD

Yes, master?

VLADIMIR

Do something to make Vangela look presentable.

RENFIELD

Yes, master.

(Looks puzzled.)

But what?

VLADIMIR

Find something that will cover the blood on her bosom.

(RENFIELD scurries about, takes a large scarf from the body VLADIMIR carried on stage. A moan sounds from the casket. RENFIELD takes the scarf to VLADIMIR who drapes it about VANGELA.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

There. No one will know.

(The body moans again.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

And take this moaning creature to her hotel. It would be a mistake for her to be found here.

RENFIELD

Yes, master.

(He picks up the body and starts off.)

VLADIMIR

Use the back stairs so no one will see you.

RENFIELD

Yes, master.

(VLADIMIR reaches into VANGELA's coffin and turns out the light. By the waning moonbeams we see VLADIMIR and VANGELA spread their garments into bat-like wings and rush toward the audience. Total darkness descends. The sound of flapping wings hovers over the audience, punctuated by the howling of wolves.)

(Blackout.)