

The Cyberspace Vampire

a comedy by Billie Snow



THE CYBERSPACE VAMPIRE

by

Billie Snow

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CHARACTERS

VLADIMIR Vladimir is the head of this local group of vampires. He wears the formal evening dress of a traditional vampire. He is interesting, mysterious, menacing. He speaks in a heavy Transylvanian accent.

VANGELA Vangela is a young, attractive vampire. She wears modern-day styles of clothing. She is allergic to dust and mold. She is also afraid of the dark.

VAN HELSING Owner of the Van Helsing Funeral Home and Casket Emporium. Inventor of specialty caskets. He is young and handsome.

VANCINIO The Almighty, All Powerful, Absolute, Grand Vizier. Oldest vampire in the world.

VOLUPTUA Exotically beautiful and sexy vampire.

VERLENE Verlene is a vampire tasked with helping Vangela. She appears to be a decade or two older than Vangela.

RENFIELD Renfield is the classic subservient assistant to a dominant vampire. His clothes are shabby and worn.

OFFICER Police officer.

MEDIC White-coated medic.

DELIVERY MAN

ROCKY

HELPER

MARKET RESEARCH MAN

VONDA

OFF-STAGE VOICE

BLOOD BANK DELIVERY MAN

SETTING

The vampire compound (catacomb-like quarters that the vampires call home), and the Van Helsing Funeral Parlor and Casket Emporium.

The vampire compound includes a room of coffins, personal quarters, and a laboratory for brewing potions.

The Van Helsing Funeral Parlor and Casket Emporium has a showroom of coffins and a viewing parlor.

TIME

2005 or thereabouts. Social media is not yet "a thing."

ACT I

Scene 1	Vampire compound, coffin area.	Nighttime.
Scene 2	Van Helsing Casket Emporium, showroom.	Same night.
Scene 3	Van Helsing Funeral Parlor, viewing parlor.	Next night.
Scene 4	Vampire living quarters.	Another night.
Scene 5	Vampire compound, initially an empty room.	Another night.
Scene 6	Vampire living quarters.	Another night.
Scene 7	Vampire living quarters.	Another night.
Scene 8	Vampire living quarters.	Same night.

ACT II

Scene 1	Vampire living quarters.	Another night.
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Scene 2	Van Helsing Casket Emporium, showroom.	Soon after.
Scene 3	Vampire living quarters.	Another night.
Scene 4	Vampire living quarters.	Another night.
Scene 5	Vampire living quarters.	Same night.
Scene 6	Vampire living quarters.	Same night.
Scene 7	Vampire living quarters.	Same night.
Scene 8	Van Helsing Casket Emporium, showroom.	Next night.
Scene 9	Van Helsing Casket Emporium, showroom.	That midnight.

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.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

SETTING: Showroom of the Van Helsing Funeral Home and Casket Emporium.

AT RISE: A soft blue light bathes the stage. A fluttering of wings announces the arrival of VLADIMIR and VANGELA. A heavy thud suggests VANGELA may have hit the side of the building on landing. As they enter, we see that VANGELA is a bit disheveled. The scarf has come loose allowing the blood on her dress to show. VLADIMIR adjusts the scarf to hide the blood.

VLADIMIR

That was the poorest demonstration of flying I have ever seen in a recruit. You barely cleared the trees, to say nothing of the housetops.

VANGELA

It's not that easy being a bat for the first time.

(VAN HELSING enters. VANGELA watches him, transfixed. As VAN HELSING approaches, she grabs VLADIMIR's arm.)

VLADIMIR

Do not be alarmed. He is only a mortal. He cannot harm you.

VANGELA

I'm not afraid. I just can't get my breath. He's ... gorgeous ... like a Greek god.

(When VAN HELSING sees VANGELA, he is equally smitten. He drops papers, he stumbles, then scoops the papers together awkwardly.)

VAN HELSING

Hello there. May I help you?

VLADIMIR

We hope so.

VAN HELSING

My name is Peter. Are you the Vangela I've been corresponding with on the internet? And what is your name, sir?

VLADIMIR

(Pronouncing it elaborately.)

Vladimir.

VAN HELSING

(Also exaggerating the pronunciation in imitation -- as VLAAD-E-MEER.)

Vlad-i-mir. Is that a first name? Or a last name?

VLADIMIR

Just Vladimir.

VAN HELSING

Yes. I see.

(Collecting himself a bit at last.)

Well, let me show you some of our products.

(He walks to the end of the line and starts to open one of the caskets.)

VANGELA

(Follows slowly, mesmerized and weak-kneed.)

What I want ... is ... a handsome ma ... that is ... I want something ... very special.

VAN HELSING

All our caskets are special. This is a Van Helsing Super Special.

(He caresses the casket lovingly as he looks at VANGELA moonstruck. Neither VANGELA nor VAN HELSING see VLADIMIR stiffen.)

VLADIMIR

Van Helsing. An interesting name. Would your name by any chance be Van Helsing?

VAN HELSING (proudly)

Yes. Yes, I'm a Van Helsing. Peter Van Helsing. Most of these are products I designed.

VLADIMIR

(Quietly, to himself.)

That name. That name. Why is it so familiar?

(Beat)

Van Helsing.

(Sudden recognition.)

Van Hell-sing! Abominable name! It is impossible. Impossible.

VANGELA

(Equally quietly, to VLADIMIR.)

What are you talking about? What is the problem?

VLADIMIR

Dracula and I had a very unfortunate experience with a Professor Van Helsing centuries ago in Transylvania. No. Not Transylvania. It was London.

VAN HELSING

You could never go wrong with this model. It is our top-of-the-line casket. We guarantee it for 10,000 miles or 10,000 years, whichever comes first. This model is guaranteed against fire, flood, earthquakes and corrosion. And, what is more -- in the event death occurred as a result of a certain kind of bite ...

(He closes the lid, then opens it again. A stake now protrudes from the lid of the casket, exactly where the occupant's heart would be. The sight of the stake causes VLADIMIR to leap back from the casket. VAN HELSING is unaware of VLADIMIR's response.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

When it is sealed, it drives a stake through the heart.

(He acts out the process. A wolf howls somewhere outside.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

Straight and true. The occupant of this casket need never worry about being stranded among the undead. I call it "The Terminator."

(His face lights up with a kind of maniacal pride. Again a wolf howls.)

It is a special kind of ... insurance.

VANGELA

Awesome!

VLADIMIR

Yes, very interesting, but I don't think it is what we are looking for. We are not superstitious.

(Unseen, VLADIMIR marks an "X" on the coffin. VAN HELSING folds the stake back into the lid, then closes the casket.)

VAN HELSING

It's your choice. But I'm here to tell you you couldn't go wrong with this baby. It's a humdinger.

VANGELA

(Still moonstruck by VAN HELSING.)

Humdinger. Yes. I think humdinger says it.

(RENFIELD rushes in, out of breath. He falls to his knees in front of VLADIMIR.)

RENFIELD

Master, master, I need your help!

VLADIMIR

(Drawing RENFIELD a bit aside.)

Do not interrupt unless you have something of importance to impart.

RENFIELD

(In a soft, but desperate voice.)

They're after me. The people in white coats. From the asylum. They saw me ...

VLADIMIR

(Spreads his cape to hide RENFIELD.)
A nuisance, but of no consequence. Here, a perfect
hiding space.

(Coffin has an elaborate "H" on its
side.)

Slip into this empty coffin. No one will see you.

VAN HELSING

What was that all about?

VLADIMIR

A former ... employee of mine. He is gone now.

(Returning his attention to the
caskets.)

We are looking for something non-allergenic.

VAN HELSING

All our products are completely hypo-allergenic. Top
to bottom. Made with dust-free acrylics. No natural
fibers of any kind. Except silk.

(He strokes the fabric and thumps the
metal. We see RENFIELD run offstage
from the back of the coffin, unseen by
the other three. Throughout the
remaining scene, VLADIMIR occasionally
peeks into coffins, behind curtains,
etc, looking for RENFIELD and not
finding him.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

Pure alloy. Solid, through and through. No cheap
platings for short-term glitter and show. We anodize
the finish, of course, for lustre.

VANGELA

That's wonderful. Isn't that wonderful, Vlady?

VLADIMIR

I'm somewhat reassured.

(A POLICE OFFICER and a white-coated
MEDIC rush in. They go through the
place, rattling the caskets with sticks
and shouting.)

OFFICER

Come out of there.

MEDIC

If he's here, we'll find him.

VAN HELSING

What is going on? I'm trying to conduct business with these people!

MEDIC

Madman on the loose, Van.

OFFICER

Stuffed an injured woman into a dumpster. Must have thought he was on TV.

(Suddenly VLADIMIR is very alert.)

MEDIC

She had these puncture wounds on her neck. And she'd lost a lot of blood. Funny thing, though, we couldn't find the blood anywhere. Not a trace of it.

OFFICER

This guy eats bugs and worms and stuff. Hangs around dark areas.

VAN HELSING

Well, he's not here. Please clear out so we can continue.

MEDIC

Okay, but don't take any chances with this guy. I tell you he's off his rocker. And dangerous.

OFFICER

No telling what he might do.

VAN HELSING

Yes, yes. We'll be careful.

(Returns to VANGELA and VLADIMIR. The
MEDIC and OFFICER leave.)

Now this model ... you said you wanted an interior light. This model has an atomic powered light we believe might last 1000 years.

(He throws open the lid. The light inside is surprisingly bright. On the underside of the lid, straight above the occupant's head, is a large ornate cross. Again, a triumphant pride leaps into VAN HELSING's face. VLADIMIR quickly hides his eyes. VANGELA has eyes only for VAN HELSING. VAN HELSING is so enraptured with his creation that he does not notice their responses.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

It's a dual-purpose model. For those who are very religious, it satisfies a desire for eternal reassurance. For those who may have died by the unfortunate kind of bite I spoke of ... I call it "The Controller." We seal it with a special caulking compound we produce from pure garlic and sacramental wafers. Nothing can get out of this baby.

VLADIMIR

It is quite ... ingenious, but not quite what we are looking for.

VAN HELSING (disappointed)

Oh. Umm. What else might interest you?

(Beat.)

Ah. I have just the thing. This beauty.

(Points to "H" marked casket that RENFIELD hopped into and out of.)

Houdini's personal, never-fail, fool-proof, specially-crafted model. Permitted his escape every time.

(He demonstrates the escape panel.)

VLADIMIR

Houdin ...

(Realizes why RENFIELD wasn't found.)

Ah! But we do not need to escape from boxes. I am not impressed.

VANGELA

That second model. Could the light be softened? I don't need a lot.

VAN HELSING

(Taken aback.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

You are shopping for yourself? For your own casket?

VLADIMIR (simultaneously)

No.

VANGELA (simultaneously)

Yes.

VAN HELSING

So which is it? Yes or no?

(Looks at them for a beat.)

Say, you're not vampires, are you?

VLADIMIR

(Laughs.)

Do we look like vampires?

VAN HELSING

Well ... uh ... no. It's just that if you're vampires, I'd have to kill you.

(Swells with pride.)

Killing vampires is the Van Helsing holy crusade.

VLADIMIR

(To VANGELA.)

We are leaving immediately.

VANGELA

(To VAN HELSING.)

No, no. We're staying. My ... uncle ... is sensitive about my desire to sleep in a coffin. But many people find them comfy and snug. Sara Bernhardt. Michael Jackson. So ... just show me your best work.

VLADIMIR (resigned)

Not too extravagant.

VANGELA

But not cheap.

VLADIMIR

It must be free of allergens.

VANGELA

And not too plain.

VLADIMIR

Durable.

VANGELA

But not at all ugly.

VLADIMIR

And it must be able to hold a cubic yard or so of dirt in the bottom.

VAN HELSING

Dirt?

VLADIMIR

For ballast.

VAN HELSING

Ballast.

VLADIMIR

In case we need to ship it overseas.

VAN HELSING

(Confused but game.)

Overseas. Yes ... I ... think I see. Well, it seems an odd set of requirements, but you know the saying, the customer is always right. Just let me see what I have in the back store room that I might modify.

(VAN HELSING turns and heads off stage. VANGELA starts to follow. VLADIMIR grabs her dress to halt her progress.)

VANGELA

Hey, what are you doing?

VLADIMIR

He is a Van Helsing. And he said he would kill us.

VANGELA

Only if he thought we were vampires. He doesn't think that.

VLADIMIR

On our native soil, we would have eliminated the swine Van Helsing and all his righteous kin from the face of the earth.

VANGELA

It's probably not even the same family.

VLADIMIR

I tell you, he is our nemesis.

VANGELA

Not mine, Vlady. I'm in love.

VLADIMIR

Find another mortuary.

VANGELA

But this is the only casket emporium open at night.

VLADIMIR

I will not do business with a Van Helsing. So. What does your spider say now?

VANGELA

My web search said to go see this Van Helsing. And here we are.

VLADIMIR

We are leaving. Do not mention Van Helsing ever again.

VANGELA

Wait. Listen. If this is the same Van Helsing family ...

VLADIMIR

Your hearing seems defective. I will not do business in a Van Helsing establishment. That is final.

VANGELA

I'm not asking you to like the place. It's downright creepy. All these special gadgets. But if we can get what I need right here ... why look further? Besides ...

VLADIMIR

Never. I know these Van Helsing. We are in danger.

VANGELA

But if it is the same family you knew before, what would prevent you from wiping this Van Helsing and his spawn from the earth now? Minus Peter, of course. And after we get my new coffin.

VLADIMIR

(Considering her in a new light.)

My dear, you can be very devious when it serves you.

VANGELA

We can track them on the web. Get back at them.

VLADIMIR

Perhaps you have the makings of a vampire yet.

(As they prepare to fly away from the
mortuary, we hear VANGELA say...)

VANGELA

You have to promise me that Peter will not be included
in this wipe-out.

VLADIMIR

We'll see. We'll see.

(We hear the rustle of wings and a
sharp thud, followed by a soft "ouch"
as the stage darkens.)

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 3

SETTING: The Van Helsing Funeral Parlor and Casket Emporium, viewing parlor.

AT RISE: VANGELA enters. Seeing no one about, she examines various odd contraptions of VAN HELSING's, looks into one coffin, solemnly examines the corpse, quietly closes the lid.

VANGELA

(Looking around.)

Hello? Anyone here?

(VAN HELSING enters.)

VAN HELSING

Oh, it's you. How delightful. But I didn't think I'd see you so soon.

VANGELA

You were expecting me?

VAN HELSING

Well, at some point. I am working on your new coffin.

VANGELA

Oh.

VAN HELSING

Please don't say you've changed your mind -- and you're cancelling our arrangement.

VANGELA

No. No. I just thought my visit would be a surprise. I had no idea you expected me to show up.

VAN HELSING

Actually, it is a surprise. I was just hoping you would appear.

VANGELA

I don't quite know how to reply to that.

VAN HELSING

In that case, say you're delighted to see me.

VANGELA

I am delighted to see you.

VAN HELSING

I haven't been able to think about anything but you since we met.

VANGELA

That's so amazing. I came to say the same thing to you.

VAN HELSING

But you didn't.

VANGELA

I lost my nerve ... in case you didn't feel the same way I do. After all, I really don't know you.

VAN HELSING

Surely you could tell how I felt when we first met. I couldn't take my eyes off you.

VANGELA

And I ... just the same.

VAN HELSING

I think I'm in love with you.

VANGELA

And I. With you. But I don't believe in love at first sight.

VAN HELSING

Neither did I -- until I saw you.

VANGELA

I'm finding it hard to breathe.

VAN HELSING

That's a promising sign.

VANGELA

Unless it's my asthma returning.

VAN HELSING

I don't think I've ever given anyone asthma.

VANGELA

Then it must be looking at you that is making me breathless.

VAN HELSING

There's only one cure for that.

VANGELA

What is that?

VAN HELSING

Prolonged exposure to the infectious agent.

VANGELA

That would be you?

VAN HELSING

Precisely.

VANGELA

Do you think that could be arranged?

VAN HELSING

I'm sure of it. I can drop everything and be at your beck and call for years.

VANGELA

That doesn't sound very rational.

VAN HELSING

Rationality is vastly overrated.

VANGELA

I'm glad to hear that since, coming here today, I've lost all desire to act in a rational manner.

VAN HELSING

Then we can indulge our attraction and not feel foolish.

VANGELA

Life is definitely looking up.

VAN HELSING

I couldn't agree more.

VANGELA

And I get a new coffin too ...

VAN HELSING

I'm working on it personally, night and day.

VANGELA

Do you work nights a lot?

VAN HELSING

All the time. I concentrate better. And the nights are quiet. It's absolutely the best time to discover vampires. They're out at night, you know.

VANGELA

You work ... every night?

VAN HELSING

That's the time I like best. I can get the old creative juices flowing. No one and nothing interrupts. Usually, that is. Of course, tonight ... right now ... well ...

VANGELA

This brings up a subject I should have asked you about before we ... before we ...

VAN HELSING

What subject? Before we what?

VANGELA

Doesn't your wife object to your working every night?

VAN HELSING

Oh no. I mean, no. I mean, I'm not married. I have no wife. You don't think I'd ... oh, no!

VANGELA

You're not married! That's wonderful.

VAN HELSING

It's just me and the coffins. No other entanglements. No complications.

VANGELA

That's wonderful.

VAN HELSING

You have no idea how blissful it can be to develop ideas about how to identify vampires, then trap and destroy them.

VANGELA

What is it about vampires that troubles you?

VAN HELSING

What is it about vampires? I'll tell you. Vampires are the epitome of ... They are ... When I think of them I ... They are scum. They are evil. They are no good. They stink. I hate them. They're ...

(VANGELA begins to shrink as VAN HELSING becomes more and more intense.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

I want to stamp them out! To the last vampire on earth! Just thinking about them makes my blood boil.

(He begins to calm down.)

Besides, they don't eat meat. I can't stand a creature that spurns nourishing food. If they're such pantywaists that they refuse red meat, they should just die. Die like the evil scum they are.

VANGELA

I love red meat.

VAN HELSING

You do? I knew it! I sensed that about you when I first saw you.

VANGELA

You did?

(Returning to reality.)

Of course, I haven't eaten much lately.

VAN HELSING

Don't worry. I'm a great cook. We'll have some great feasts.

VANGELA

I'm sure we will. But returning to our previous conversation, aren't you afraid I'll ... that is, aren't you afraid a vampire will bite you and turn you into one of the undead?

VAN HELSING

It's what I dread most. Fortunately, they usually prefer women. Young women. Young pretty women. Like yourself. That's why you should be careful.

VANGELA

But say I ... er, say one did bite you?

VAN HELSING

I've thought about it, don't think I haven't. And I'm prepared. I have designed my own casket, just in case.

VANGELA

(Shudders.)

Brrr. You mean like the one ...?

(She gestures to show a stake through her heart.)

VAN HELSING

Exactly! I will not walk the earth as a member of the undead!

VANGELA (cautiously)

Tell me, how do you know a vampire when you see one?

VAN HELSING

(His distress gradually diminishing.)

It's not always easy, believe me. They are very tricky. But I have devised a number of vampire detectors. Mirrors where you don't expect them. Crosses that leap out at you when ... Here, I'll show you.

(He picks up a rectangular box-like object. As he opens it, VANGELA turns away. He is too intent on his creation to notice.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

This looks like an ordinary ash wood storage case. You could keep a set of steak knives in it.

VAN HELSING (Continued)

Or use it to store silk stockings or costume jewelry or even old toenail parings. But lo and behold when you open it, there is a mirror in the form of a cross! Framed with pure garlic!

VANGELA

That's so ingenious.

VAN HELSING

And the whole thing is backed by sacramental wafers! Any vampire looking into this box would be immediately repelled. And I'd know! I'd know! No vampire can escape detection by me for very long. I assure you of that.

VANGELA

Oh, I believe you. And your box is wonderful. So creative.

VAN HELSING

(Full of pride.)

It's sure fire. Never misses.

VANGELA

Never misses.

VAN HELSING

I just arrange a situation where it makes sense to show a person some special collection. Say this is it.

(Pats the ash wood box.)

Then pow! I open it.

(Opens the box for VANGELA who manages to look away.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

Sometimes they shudder and draw back. Sometimes they try to knock the box from my hands. Sometimes they turn into a bat and fly away screaming. But, whatever they do, I know. Then it's on to Plan B.

VANGELA

Plan B?

VAN HELSING

Yes. Plan B drives a stake through their hearts!

VANGELA

Aren't you ever afraid of uh ... them?

VAN HELSING

Fear has nothing to do with it.

VANGELA

You must be very ... strong.

VAN HELSING

(Flexes a not-much-to-brag-about
bicep.)

Well, you know, I do move a lot of caskets. It takes
some doing, let me tell you.

VANGELA

I meant, strong minded. You are so intense.

VAN HELSING

That's because I'm around you.

VANGELA

Now you're teasing me.

(There is a long pause as they gaze
besottedly into each other's eyes.)

VANGELA (Continued)

I must get back. It's late. And I still have chores to
do. We'll talk soon.

VAN HELSING

But ...

VANGELA

Trust me.

VAN HELSING

But ...

VANGELA

Good night.

VAN HELSING

Wait ...!

(VANGELA exits.)

Did I misunderstand her? I thought ...

(With sudden conviction.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

She's the one for me. I didn't think it would ever happen. But she's the one. She's exactly what I want!

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 4

SETTING: Interior of vampire living quarters.

AT RISE: VANGELA is at her laptop keyboard, obviously agitated. VERLENE is filing her fingernails. From time to time, she turns a page of the tabloid -- The Vampire Gazette -- beside her.

VANGELA

He's not married! Isn't that wonderful?!

(Beat.)

But he hates vampires. That's terrible!

(Beat.)

What a mess! And you're no help at all. Maybe someone on the undead chatline will have an idea.

(She finishes typing and pats the laptop.)

There. Let's see what turns up.

VERLENE

I think my nails have stopped growing. My fangs keep getting longer. But my nails ...

VANGELA

What do you think I should do?

VERLENE

Get false nails. It's the only solution. If they won't grow, they won't grow.

VANGELA

I mean about Peter.

VERLENE

Peter who?

VANGELA

Haven't you been listening? Peter Van Helsing.

VERLENE

I don't know, honey. Same thing I told you yesterday, and five minutes ago. Bite him. Then you can be together forever.

VANGELA

Bite him? Bite him? You don't understand what that will do to him.

VERLENE

Oh, I know exactly what it would do to him. It will make him just like the two of us.

VANGELA

That's not what I mean. I mean it wouldn't work. He has a special casket for himself. To protect him from vampirism. I'd lose him forever.

VERLENE

(Shrugs.)

Then deceive him. Don't let him know. That should be easy for you. The way you look, no one would suspect you are one of us.

VANGELA (unbelieving)

I'll bet.

VERLENE

Turn on the old vampire charm. With our mesmerizing gaze, we can captivate our prey and seduce the most zealous non-believer.

VANGELA

How long would that work? Two minutes at my very best. I'm not very good at deception.

VERLENE

Okay. I concede. You're absolutely right, kiddo. You've got a problem.

VANGELA

You'd think that once -- just once -- things would go right for me. But no. There was Vladimir with those sexy bedroom eyes. How was I to know he was a vampire? Even when he bit me I thought -- hey, whatever turns him on! He always dressed nicely. Evening wear all the time. And his hair slicked back. I thought ... toupee?

VANGELA (Continued)

But it was real. And I just thought he had a poor dentist. Now, after fending off nerds and jerks and losers half my life, Mr. Right comes along and ...

VERLENE

Hey, kid. Make the most of every situation. That's my motto.

VANGELA

Sure. Survivors like you always say that.

VERLENE

Who knows?

(VANGELA gives VERLENE a dismissive wave. She turns back to her laptop.)

VANGELA

I've got an answer from the chatline ... "Sorry you thought so little of my reply that you cut me off. Given the circumstances, I believe it would be the best solution by far. Give ex-transit some serious consideration."

VERLENE

Who said that?

VANGELA

What do you mean?

VERLENE (casually)

Is it possible to tell who's writing you?

VANGELA

You mean, who said something about going back?

VERLENE

Something like that. Sounded to me like Voluptua.

VANGELA

There's that word. That thing. That whatever that you mentioned. Voluptua.

VERLENE

Not thing. Vladimir's love.

VANGELA

You're confusing me. Vladimir had a love who was mortal? Wouldn't she be dead dead dead by now?

VERLENE

Not mortal. Forget I said the word Voluptua.

VANGELA

That's the second time you've told me to forget Voluptua. What gives here?

VERLENE

Forget I said the word. Forget it. Ask me something else. Ask me about ex-transit.

VANGELA

Okay. What's ex-transit?

VERLENE

You know. Going back. To human.

VANGELA

I'm ready. Are you saying it's possible?

(VERLENE tries to ignore VANGELA by paging through her tabloid -- The Vampire Gazette.)

VANGELA (Continued)

You know, don't you? Tell me. Tell me!

VERLENE

I can't.

VANGELA

Yeah. Like all those "not part of my job description" excuses you're so free with. You mean you won't.

VERLENE

(Pretending to be uninformed.)

I can't tell you what I don't know, can I?

VANGELA

Then who can?

VERLENE

I can't tell you that either.

VANGELA

I'll find out. Don't you understand? If there's a chance I can -- what did you call it? "Ex-transit?" -- I'll take it. No matter what.

VERLENE

You don't know what you're letting yourself in for.

VANGELA

It couldn't be worse than eternity without someone you love. I want to be with Peter. Nothing else matters.

VERLENE

Ex-transit is not pretty.

VANGELA

(With sudden insight.)

Vladimir! It would be Vladimir.

VERLENE (uneasy)

I didn't tell you that.

VANGELA

You don't have to. He's in charge. The question is, how will I ever get him to tell me?

VERLENE

I'm just supposed to help you be a competent vampire. So, leave me out of it. Please.

VANGELA

How do I get Vladimir to ...

VERLENE

Kiddo, nobody gets Vladimir to do anything. He's one tough customer.

VANGELA

There has to be a way. Everybody has a weakness. Vladimir's vain. And he thinks of himself as smart ...

VERLENE

He is smart. And, when it serves his purposes, he's ruthless as well.

VANGELA

So? I'll just have to be equally ruthless.

VERLENE

(Laughs.)

That will be fun to watch. But if I miss your big vicious scene, let me know how you make out. I always enjoy the preposterous.

(After a longish pause, VERLENE shakes her head.)

VERLENE (Continued)

No. I can't tell you. It's not part of my job description.

VANGELA

Just what is your job description?

VERLENE

To help you.

VANGELA

Well ...? Wouldn't it be helping me to tell me what you know?

VERLENE (reluctantly)

It would be getting you off my back. That's the best that would happen. You really are serious about this, aren't you?

VANGELA

You can bet your sweet patootie on it.

VERLENE

I've heard it is possible. But ... I haven't a clue as to how to go about it.

VANGELA

You'll have to do better than that.

VERLENE

Give me some time here. I haven't thought about this in about a century and a half. Just cool it a minute.

VANGELA

Okay. Minute it is.

(Beat.)

Time's up.

VERLENE

Thinking about it, I'm pretty sure it has to do with bat's blood.

VANGELA

Aargh. I should have known. What then? Well? Don't stop now.

VERLENE

I'm not sure if you drink it or bathe in it.

VANGELA

How many bats?

(Shudders.)

This is what's not going to be pretty.

VERLENE

Just keep your goal in the forefront of your mind. Then you'll do fine.

VANGELA

But bats! Why couldn't it have been something easy like ... drinking pond scum ... or eating live snails.

VERLENE

I don't really know how many bats. I'd say a lot, though. And I'm pretty sure you bathe in it. Yep. A bat-blood bath.

VANGELA

Aaaah. On my skin.

(Beat.)

I guess I'd better find a lot of bats if I've got to bathe in their blood. How much blood would a bat have? A thimbleful? Where will I find enough bats?

(Beat.)

I know. Renfield. He'll help.

VERLENE

He'd probably keep them for himself and train them to catch bugs for him.

VANGELA

But it's a start. I'm on my way. And I owe it all to you.

(She leans over and kisses VERLENE who looks uneasy at this new turn of events. VANGELA exits singing "I love bats.")

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 5

SETTING: Somewhere in the dungeon-like place the vampires call "home."

AT RISE: A delivery man enters with a clipboard. He looks around.

DELIVERY MAN

What a dump! But I guess it's as good a place as any for a coffin. Hello! Anybody home?

VANGELA

What is it?

DELIVERY MAN

Delivery for ... Ms. Vangella?

VANGELA

A delivery for me?

DELIVERY MAN

If you're Ms. Vangella. Sign here.

VANGELA

(Signing.)

What is it?

DELIVERY MAN

I don't look inside, lady. I got boxes and packages and envelopes and saddlebags ... yours looks like a coffin.

(He takes the clipboard and calls offstage.)

Okay, Rocky. This is the right place after all. Let's get rid of it.

(He exits briefly. He and ROCKY return with a coffin. It is clearly marked with a crudely lettered "H" that we saw earlier on the "HOUDINI" coffin.)

DELIVERY MAN (Continued)

Where ya want it, lady?

VANGELA

(Waves toward upstage center.)

There. Against the wall. Uh ... out a little bit. No. Move it a little to the right. That's fine.

DELIVERY MAN

(Tears off the shipping form copy and gives it to VANGELA.)

It's all yours. Enjoy, lady.

(DELIVERY MAN and ROCKY exit. VANGELA raises the lid, closes it, shakes her head.)

VANGELA

This isn't what I ordered. What's going on? There's been some mix-up. I better get in touch with Peter.

(VANGELA exits. VLADIMIR enters from the opposite direction. He speaks to someone offstage.)

VLADIMIR

Easy. Easy. Pretend you're carrying a precious and venerable antique.

(RENFIELD and HELPER appear, carrying another coffin. It has a conspicuous but crude sign marked "V", though it isn't clear what the letter is for.)

RENFIELD

Where do you want it?

HELPER (grunting)

Are all coffins this heavy?

VLADIMIR

It is specially made. That is why it is so heavy. Now. Where would Vancinio like it? I think ... there!

(He indicates upstage left. RENFIELD and the HELPER place the coffin where VLADIMIR indicates.)

RENFIELD

Vancinio? Is Vancinio coming here? You must be very honored. He never goes anywhere!

VLADIMIR

I'm afraid he's coming to deal with a problem. It isn't a social visit.

RENFIELD

Oh. I thought ...

VLADIMIR

The important thing is that he'll have a comfortable place to stay. I don't want him unhappy with me about this mess with Vangela.

RENFIELD

Oh.

VLADIMIR

Now, go get the one I ordered for Vangela. I understand it is also ready.

(VLADIMIR gives a little flutter of his fingers to wave RENFIELD and the HELPER on their way. He opens the coffin, hops in to test its softness. He pats the lining, gets out, closes the coffin and exits.)

(The DELIVERY MAN enters again, clipboard and all.)

DELIVERY MAN

Hel-lo! I'm back! Got another delivery for Ms. Vangella!

(VANGELA enters.)

VANGELA

Here I am. What is it now?

DELIVERY MAN

Got another one for you ...

VANGELA

So soon? I just got off the phone with Mr. Van Helsing.

DELIVERY MAN

Apparently some kind of a mix-up. Who knows? Red tape. Computer errors. Stuff goes to the wrong place sometimes.

(He hands VANGELA the clipboard and a pen to sign for the delivery.)

VANGELA

(Signing the form.)

I suppose it's okay.

(She hands the clipboard back.)

DELIVERY MAN

I just do what the shipping orders say.

(To ROCKY, offstage.)

Hey Rocco ... this is it. Let's get it in here.

(He exits briefly and reappears with ROCKY. They bring in a coffin that bears a sign consisting of a "halo.")

DELIVERY MAN (Continued)

(To VANGELA.)

Where do you want it?

VANGELA

(Looking around.)

It's getting crowded in here.

(She points upstage right.)

Over there. Under the window, I guess. We're running out of choices.

DELIVERY MAN

Okay, lady.

(The DELIVERY MAN and ROCKY place the coffin where VANGELA suggests. The DELIVERY MAN rips off the top sheet from his shipping form, hands it to VANGELA, and the two start to leave.)

ROCKY

(Looking around.)

What do these people do? Play "musical coffins?"

VANGELA

(Indicating the coffin marked "H".)
 Wait! Aren't you going to take this one with you? I think it was delivered by mistake.

DELIVERY MAN

(Looking through the papers on his clipboard.)
 I got no instructions to pick anything up.

VANGELA

Well, I suppose it's always nice to have an extra coffin. Just in case ... but ... what about the person this one belongs to?

DELIVERY MAN

(Shrugs.)
 He's probably dead. Anyway, I can't put it back on the truck without a shipping order. So, it stays right here.

VANGELA

All right. But I don't understand it.

ROCKY

Lady, we don't try to understand things. We just follow orders.

(The DELIVERY MAN and ROCKY exit.)

VANGELA

This is ridiculous.

(VANGELA exits and VLADIMIR enters.)

VLADIMIR

(Speaks to RENFIELD who is still offstage.)
 Ah! Renfield. What would I ever do without you? In here. In here. Careful there. You know how persnickety Vangela is.

(VLADIMIR looks around for a place to put this coffin. RENFIELD and HELPER carry yet another coffin onstage. The sign on it is marked "SPECIAL ORDER".)

RENFIELD

(Puffing for breath.)

Where? Where?

VLADIMIR

Yes! It's beginning to look delightfully like a morgue. Let's see. Not much choice ... Here, I guess.

(RENFIELD and the HELPER place the "SPECIAL ORDER" coffin where VLADIMIR indicates.)

VLADIMIR

Good work, Renfield. You can go now. And, by the way, I noticed a nest of spiders overhead in the entryway.

RENFIELD

(Eyes brightening.)

Oh, thank you, master. I'll ...

(He realizes the HELPER is listening.)

... do something about them right away.

(RENFIELD and the HELPER exit. VLADIMIR examines the inside of the lid on the "SPECIAL ORDER" coffin. He nods in satisfaction, closes the lid and exits.)

(VERLENE enters. She looks about at the collection of coffins, hand on hips, surveying the scene.)

VERLENE

What a mess! Some people have absolutely no taste. These signs! They are ugh-gee!

(She rips the signs off all four coffins, then stands back to look at them again.)

VERLENE (Continued)

And the colors don't go together. Let's see.

(She shoves the coffins to new locations, shifting their orientation to one another and to the room.)

After each shift, she examines her work, then moves them again. By the time she is through, there is no telling which coffin is which.)

VERLENE (Continued)

There. That is much better.

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 6

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VLADIMIR is poking at VANGELA's laptop, using a one-finger approach. It beeps at him. He frowns. Pokes at it some more, then smiles, displaying the pleasure of triumph. VANGELA enters.

VANGELA

Vlady, you old fox, what are you doing with my laptop? Looking for sweet young things on the internet?

VLADIMIR

(Recoils from the laptop.)

Of course not! Why would you think ...?

VANGELA

Don't worry, Vlady. I won't tell. Your secret's safe with me.

VLADIMIR (haughtily)

There is no secret to tell.

VANGELA

(Looks at screen.)

Evening clothes? Vests? Capes?

(To VLADIMIR.)

You want to set standards for what the well-dressed vampire will wear this season?

VLADIMIR

It is important to look one's best at all times. I don't go about with blood all over my bosom like some people I could mention.

VANGELA

I think it's cute that you're interested in the 'Net. Tell me what you want to research and I'll help.

VLADIMIR

No, no. I was merely indulging a little curiosity. Just killing time while waiting for the arrival of a valued colleague of mine.

VANGELA

Yeah? Who's that?

VLADIMIR

The Almighty, All Powerful, Absolute, Grand Vizier Vancinio.

VANGELA

The what? How'd he get such a moniker?

VLADIMIR

Watch your tongue. This gentleman is deserving of great respect. He is the oldest vampire in the world. A respectful manner toward your elders is always becoming in a recruit.

VANGELA

Manners. Oops. I'll work on that, pops.

(Beat.)

Why is this ... almighty ... all powerful ... Grand Geezer coming here?

VLADIMIR

We have many things to discuss.

VANGELA

Let me guess. Like my case.

VLADIMIR

Child, child. You have a lively imagination. But we do not usually discuss new recruits.

VANGELA

Yeah, but when they want to leave the ranks of the undead ... return to a mortal state ... go "ex-transit", I'll bet that's on your front burner.

VLADIMIR

So. Someone's been talking.

VANGELA

Yep. Me. To everyone who'll listen to my questions.

VLADIMIR

Returning to a human form is out of the question. Out of the question. Do not waste my time with this frivolity any longer.

VANGELA

It's not frivolous and I am going to return. I'll keep digging 'til I find out. I already know one way.

VLADIMIR

Bat's blood won't do it.

VANGELA

You're just trying to discourage me. Besides, how did you know that's what I found out?

VLADIMIR

You forget vampires, accomplished ones, have the ability to read the minds of their companions -- even their adversaries.

VANGELA

I don't care what obstacles you put in my way. I'm going to be mortal again and nothing will stop me.

VLADIMIR

I see that you are very determined. Whether or not you can succeed without powerful help I cannot predict. I will do nothing now until I speak with my cohort, our Almighty, All Powerful, Absolute, Grand Vizier Vancinio.

VANGELA

Grand Vizier. Right.

(Looks at her watch.)

Oops. I'm late for Vampire 101. See you after class.

(VANGELA exits and VANCINIO appears. He is old old old. His back is stooped. His teeth are failing him, especially his fangs. And his tuxedo is in tatters. He has clearly been in a high wind. He tries to smooth down his few strands of hair as he sees VLADIMIR.)

VLADIMIR

Maestro. What a pleasure to see you after so many years. It must be half a century at least. It's good that you are here.

VANCINIO

What's that? Speak up, lad. Stop mumbling. Why is it that no one speaks properly these days? Why does this younger generation swallow their words? I said why are you swallowing your words?

VLADIMIR

It's a pleasure to see you again. It's good you are here.

VANCINIO

Hear? I hear perfectly well. There's nothing wrong with my hearing. People mumble. I said people mumble.

VLADIMIR

I wish only to serve you, Maestro. After all these centuries you must realize that. Your every wish is my command.

VANCINIO

That's as it should be.

VLADIMIR

But I must first know what that wish is. Unfortunately, for some unknown reason, I have lost my ability to read your mind.

VANCINIO

You say you're not real kind? No vampire is kind. What nonsense. We're not supposed to be kind. I expected greater intelligence from you.

VLADIMIR

I SAID --

(Beat.)

Let's move to a location where it is easier to hear each other. Here in this secluded space between coffins.

VANCINIO

Hear. Hear. You seem to have a fixation on hearing. Are you losing your hearing? Perhaps that is why you keep mumbling.

VLADIMIR

My hearing is fine.

VANCINIO

Fortunately, age doesn't seem to affect mine. But you are correct. Voices sound louder here.

VLADIMIR

Let us get to the business at hand. What are we to do with Vangela?

VANCINIO

Van who? Speak up, lad. Don't mumble.

VLADIMIR

VANGELA. VANGELA. The reason you are here. Vangela. The new recruit who wants to return to being human.

VANCINIO

You want to become human? Why would you want to do such a stupid thing?

VLADIMIR

Not I. I have no desire to return to that ridiculous condition. It's Vangela who wishes to become mortal once again.

VANCINIO

If you want to return to that outlandish state of being, I'll have to consider taking away your rank and privileges as my top administrator here. I must say I'm disappointed in you. After all these centuries together, you want to become human again.

VLADIMIR

Not I. VANGELA. Vangela wishes to return to human form.

VANCINIO

And that reminds me. I'm upset at the way you've handled this Vangela business.

VANCINIO (Continued)

I don't remember the details, but I remember I'm disappointed. May have to apply sanctions here.

VLADIMIR

It's Vangela I wish to talk to you about.

VANCINIO

Don't try to change the subject. You'll do better to stick to the subject.

VLADIMIR

Vangela is the reason I asked you to make the long trip to our humble quarters here.

VANCINIO

And I don't think you realize how tiring that trip from Transylvania can be. I got caught in a headwind around the Bermuda Triangle and it just about shredded my bat wings. I almost perished. And I forgot to bring my vitamins. See that Verlene puts some out for me tonight. Now what did you want?

VLADIMIR

We must decide how to handle the problem with Vangela.

VANCINIO

I remember. Why do you keep repeating yourself? That's a sign of age, you know.

VLADIMIR

Eight hundred is not so old. But let's talk of Vangela.

VANCINIO

That inept, scaredy-cat bungling recruit, right?

VLADIMIR

I suppose you could characterize her that way.

VANCINIO

Get rid of her.

VLADIMIR

She wants to return to human form.

VANCINIO

She's a disgrace to the traditions of vampirism. Why is it today's vampires are of such poor quality? Can you tell me that?

VLADIMIR

Seems she's fallen in love. And wants to experience human emotions again.

VANCINIO

Love. That's a disease.

VLADIMIR

(Falling into his dreamy 'love' reverie.)

But what a beautiful disease. I remember in 1643 I was in love with a baroness.

VANCINIO

I thought it was a countess.

VLADIMIR

No. No. You're thinking of the Bavarian princess. That was earlier. In 1528.

VANCINIO

And who are we talking about now?

VLADIMIR

The beautiful baroness. She was talented, witty. Such an adventurous and amorous creature. I was sure I had discovered eternal joy. But alas, she was too adventurous.

VANCINIO

What happened to her?

VLADIMIR

She challenged the power of sunbeams and burst into flame. In seconds she became a pitiful little pile of grey ash.

(VLADIMIR shudders at the memory.)

VANCINIO

Serves her right. Wandering around in the sunlight. When's the last time you saw that vixen Voluptua?

VLADIMIR (dreamily)

Voluptua. Voluptua. My lost Voluptua.

VANCINIO

Now, now. Don't carry on so. This doesn't solve your Vangela problem.

(Beat when VLADIMIR does not respond.)

I said what are you going to do about the Vangela problem?

VLADIMIR

(Slowly recovering.)

Voluptua. My sweet Voluptua. Vangela. You mentioned Vangela. Yes.

VANCINIO

When I left you in charge of vampire training, I had no idea you'd be such a pushover for a pretty face. You've certainly dropped the ball here. Just get rid of her. Simple problems call for simple solutions.

VLADIMIR

If she returns to human form, that's getting rid of her.

VANCINIO

Returning is impossible. She'd tell everyone our secrets. No, get rid of her.

VLADIMIR

She doesn't know anything to tell. She hasn't been in the compound long enough to discover secrets.

VANCINIO

You can't depend on that. And what about that weird gadget she's got? That compressor?

VLADIMIR

Computer, sir. It computes. Hence its name, computer.

VANCINIO

Compressor. Computer. Commuter. Whatever. She could easily use it to find out classified vampire material. No, she's got to go. Stake her or burn her. Take your pick. But do it.

VLADIMIR

Actually, sir, I was thinking of using her to help rid us of a far more dangerous adversary.

VANCINIO

Is there something in the blood supply here that softens the brain? When did we start using bungling recruits to defeat our enemies?

VLADIMIR

I know at first it sounds a little preposterous, but the person our Vangela wishes to become human for, or to experience love with, is our old foe, a Van Helsing.

VANCINIO

You jest. We eradicated those vermin a century ago.

VLADIMIR

Unfortunately, at least one exists today. And he is the one Vangela loves.

VANCINIO

Impossible. No true vampire could ever be attracted to that Van Helsing scum.

VLADIMIR

Nevertheless, that's the situation. And that's how we could eliminate both of them at the same time.

VANCINIO

Hmmmph.

(Pause.)

Hmmmm. You're thinking ...

VLADIMIR

Exactly.

VANCINO

But how would it work?

VLADIMIR

That's why I need your input, sir. Your tactical experience. Your centuries of scheming and treacherous dealings.

VANCINIO

You flatter me.

VLADIMIR

Au contraire. Your fame is worldwide. And I need your council.

VANCINIO

Well, if you put it that way.

(During this next speech, VANCINIO takes out an emery board and begins to file his fangs.)

VLADIMIR

I'm so relieved to have you in agreement on how to handle this matter.

(Puzzled at VANCINIO's actions.)

Are you having trouble with your teeth, sir?

VANCINIO

Irksome things are dull. In addition to being loose. I never should have agreed to drop the Greater Vampire Dental Cooperative. Just to save a few bucks. Haven't had good dental care since.

VLADIMIR

Yes.

VANCINIO

You too?

VLADIMIR

No, no. I was merely acknowledging agreement. I have no trouble with my teeth.

(Beat.)

About our plans. I thought perhaps we could use the Vera Cruz solution.

VANCINIO

Hmmm. Too tame. Not grisly enough for a Van Helsing. It's got to be nasty. Drawn out.

VLADIMIR

An agonizing demise.

VANCINIO

Exactly.

VLADIMIR

You want him to realize his time has run out. That he is doomed. And he will suffer.

VANCINIO

Exactly.

VLADIMIR

So how about the Helsinki operation? Amended, of course, to fit this situation.

VANCINIO

Helsinki. Perfect.

VLADIMIR

We can start at the beginning of the full moon.

VANCINIO

Certainly. Then the fun begins.

VLADIMIR

Indeed.

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 7

SETTING: Interior of vampire living quarters.

AT RISE: VLADIMIR, VANCINIO, RENFIELD, VERLENE and VANGELA are conferring quietly together when a flurry of heavy sighs and whisperings interrupts their conversation. The sounds emanate from a group of MALES peering into the compound from the doorway. A couple of the MALES have passed out. VONDA appears. She carries and hands out dark sunshades to all males in her vicinity. She hands glasses to VANCINIO who quickly puts them on. VLADIMIR refuses the glasses.

VLADIMIR

Can it be? It is possible? Has my darling returned?

(VOLUPTUA enters, and steam rises at this spot. Out of the mist we see a vision of female loveliness emerge. RENFIELD, who did not get the glasses, is transfixed. VONDA sees his dilemma and places the glasses on his face. VOLUPTUA and VLADIMIR stare at each other for an instant, then fly into a steamy embrace. At the clinch, more steam swirls around the pair.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

My little cabbage. My love.

VANGELA

(To VERLENE.)

What is going on here? Why don't we get glasses? And who is this creature?

VERLENE

This is Voluptua. Didn't you see those swooning males in the doorway? Poor devils drool, pass out and go mad at the sight of her. Unless they're wearing sunglasses. We don't need such protection. Being female, we're -- uh -- immune to Voluptua's charms.

VANGELA

That's weird.

VERLENE

You got that right. Word is, no male is safe around her.

VANGELA

That's ridiculous.

VERLENE

See for yourself. Why do you think that pitiful creature is handing out glasses? And you can see how Voluptua has Vladimir wrapped around her little finger.

VANGELA

So?

VERLENE

Just watch out. She's likely to go after your guy. Add him to her collection.

VANGELA

Hah. I can handle this. I've seen beauties before.

VERLENE

Sure you have. But not like this one.

VANGELA

Beauty isn't everything.

VERLENE

You poor baby. You don't know much about men, do you? I'm cutting out. I hate seeing grown men reduced to such blithering idiocy.

VANGELA

It's certainly stomach-churning. Let's go.

(VERLENE and VANGELA exit.)

VLADIMIR

My little squash blossom! I knew you'd return to me.
Despite what others might think.

VOLUPTUA

(Asks casually, as though it's not
important.)

What'd they say about me?

VLADIMIR

That you're beautiful. Breathtaking. Voluptuous.

VOLUPTUA

(Yawns.)

I know that. What else did they say?

VLADIMIR

That you're alluring. Gorgeous.

VOLUPTUA

(Yawns again.)

Did they say anything else?

VLADIMIR

That you're mindblowingly luscious.

(More kisses. He pauses to look about.)

I'd forgotten how difficult it is to see through all
this steam.

VOLUPTUA

That's all they said?

VLADIMIR

That you drive men mad. Do you think we could do
something about this vapor?

VOLUPTUA

Didn't they mention how clever I am?

VLADIMIR

Um, I don't remember.

VOLUPTUA

Nothing about my intelligence?

VLADIMIR

Um, I don't think so.

VOLUPTUA

My ability to solve problems?

VLADIMIR

I didn't really listen. I'm just delirious that you're here again. That we're together.

VOLUPTUA

Hmmmm. Let me look at you. You haven't changed a bit. Just become more distinguished. But that accent! Why do you keep it? Transylvania is a terrible place.

VLADIMIR

I like to remember where I came from. I didn't have to be rescued from an angry mob of Transylvanian women.

VOLUPTUA

You know I'm not responsible for the silly way their men acted. But thanks for getting me out.

VLADIMIR

You certainly can never go back. But look at you. Even more beautiful. I've missed you so. It's been ages since we were together.

VOLUPTUA

It's a treat to be here. Remind me to thank Vancinio for inviting me.

VLADIMIR

Vancinio asked you? What could he have been thinking?

VOLUPTUA (annoyed)

You're doing it again.

VLADIMIR

(Sensing he's put his foot in it.)

Doing what?

VOLUPTUA

Don't play the innocent. You know.

VLADIMIR

I don't know. I don't. I haven't a clue.

VOLUPTUA

I've been back a millisecond and you're implying my return is a disruption to the real work of the compound.

VLADIMIR

You know I can't work when you're around.

VOLUPTUA

I hear you have a different distraction.

VLADIMIR

You're my only distraction.

VOLUPTUA

Don't toy with me.

VLADIMIR

I love to toy with you. Your skin, your hair, your ...

VOLUPTUA

And the Vangela creature?

VLADIMIR

You insult me. Recruits do not interest me in that way.

VOLUPTUA

Then why don't you get rid of this bungling greenhorn?

VLADIMIR

So that's why Vancinio asked you here.

VOLUPTUA

I thought you were glad to see me. But you want to talk about an old man.

VLADIMIR

I'm more interested in nuzzling your delicious neck.

VOLUPTUA

Hmmm. Ah, my love. You are really why I returned. Why don't we find a coffin and ...

VLADIMIR

My thought exactly ... oh, my pumpkin, after all these years to have you with me again ...

(They race to the nearest coffin -- only to find it occupied -- they move to the next -- it too has an occupant.)

VOLUPTUA

This is the best you can do after all these years?
Fill every available trysting spot?

VLADIMIR

When I left this morning, every coffin was available.
I don't understand this.

VOLUPTUA

I don't have a lot of time here. I have to be in Geneva in three days for that international conference on blood.

VLADIMIR

But you can't leave so soon! You're always running off! During our Portugal interlude, you scurried off to that International Congress on Alternative Life Styles for Vampires.

VOLUPTUA

Yes, but didn't I make it up to you? In Montreal?

VLADIMIR

And you cut short our Malaga holiday to attend that Symposium on Increasing Economic Well-Being of Vampires.

VOLUPTUA

And aren't we doing better financially as a result?

VLADIMIR

It's not fair. You're always dashing off and leaving me.

VOLUPTUA

Don't sulk.

VLADIMIR

I never sulk. But if you truly loved me, you'd stay longer.

VOLUPTUA

Be happy that one of us keeps up with what's happening in the world. I told you about this important conference. It's on the new blood substitute. Hemoplasmique. It's so important to our future. Imagine having a blood substitute that is easily available, needs no refrigeration, and can be bought at any supermarket. That's why I have to be at this conference.

(They are about to leave when the occupant of the coffin rises up and speaks.)

MARKET RESEARCH MAN

Excuse me -- I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. I wonder if you'd be good enough to answer a few questions. I represent the Society for the Prevention of Premature Burial. We're doing research on coffins, caskets, urns, every type of burial unit ...

VLADIMIR

How the devil did you get in here?

MARKET RESEARCH MAN

Saw these lovely containers. The quality of the workmanship is extraordinary. In checking them out, I must have fallen asleep. I apologize if I've ...

(He sees VOLUPTUA, swoons, moans, and falls back into the casket.)

VLADIMIR

For God's sake. Vonda! Renfield! Get this sniveling booby some glasses. Then get him out of here.

(VONDA and RENFIELD run onstage, do VLADIMIR's bidding, and quickly exit with the mesmerized MARKET RESEARCH MAN.)

VLADIMIR

Now, where were we? With only days to enjoy each other, we need to savor every moment. HMMMM. You're as tasty as my first victim.

VOLUPTUA

I remembered you as more of a poet than that.

VLADIMIR

I am a poet. I'm just transfixed by your presence. But let us resume our love making.

VOLUPTUA

You can't expect me to make love in a coffin just dirtied by that popinjay! And where's my own coffin? Vancinio promised it would be here when I arrived.

VLADIMIR

But all the other coffins are occupied! And yours is not here! Let one of the recruits find it. My darling. It's been ages since we shared our love. I want you now.

VOLUPTUA

I don't understand you. Here we are in the new millennium and you continue to occupy the same style of substandard lodgings we endured in the Middle Ages.

VLADIMIR

I see nothing wrong with following our noble tradition.

VOLUPTUA

It's yesterday! I'm talking about joining the twenty-first century. Better living quarters. Equality for our people! Justice for vampires! Maybe even reparations.

VLADIMIR

I think you've been sucking that TV evangelist's blood again. You know how you get.

VOLUPTUA

We should organize protests. It's time we came out of our coffins. We should picket government offices to demand recognition of our rights.

VLADIMIR

I kind of like things the way they are.

VOLUPTUA

I can see the protests now: "EQUAL RIGHTS FOR VAMPIRES." "DOWN WITH VAMPIRE DISCRIMINATION." And you know the best thing we could do for ourselves? Streamline and automate the blood supply.

VLADIMIR

You're delusional!

VOLUPTUA

Think about it, Vlad. If we use current technology and apply the principles of agribusiness to the blood supply, we can eliminate the one-person-one-meal approach we're tied to now. It's too energy-intensive. And its inefficient and old hat.

VLADIMIR

What bad blood have you been feeding on to give you such outrageous ideas?

VOLUPTUA

Just listen to me. I've given a lot of thought to this problem. With fresh blood delivered to your coffin every day just at dusk, there'd be no need to skulk along alleyways in search of a careless straggler.

VLADIMIR

Good God, woman! You'd take the romance out of being a vampire!

VOLUPTUA

Romance?

VLADIMIR

The thrills. The sport. The excitement of stalking the prey. If I were a thinking man, I'd say your ideas border on revisionism.

VOLUPTUA

Don't you understand the critical times we're in? The need for new ideas? New ways of doing things?

VLADIMIR

You're mad! You might as well try to organize the blood supply around ethnic preferences.

VOLUPTUA

Vlad! What a terrific idea! Italian, Greek, French -- oh the exquisite taste of foie gras in the blood stream. Imagine being able to order up whatever taste sensation you craved. I knew you agreed with me.

VLADIMIR

But I didn't ...

VOLUPTUA

I have so many life improvement ideas to share with you. Oh, my love, let's find a spot where we can properly say "hello" and "welcome" to each other.

VLADIMIR

But I didn't mean -- I didn't agree -- find a spot? A trysting spot? My exquisite love-bunny. I couldn't agree more.

(As they leave to find a suitable spot,
we hear VOLUPTUA say:)

VOLUPTUA

The thing I like most about you is that you're so deliciously corruptible.

(Blackout.)

ACT I

SCENE 8

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VANGELA is checking travel brochures on mountain retreats and spas which welcome vampires. VOLUPTUA enters.

VANGELA

Oh, it's you.

VOLUPTUA

Let's skip the girlish chitchat and get right to the point. What have you done with my coffin?

VANGELA

Nothing.

VOLUPTUA

Perhaps you didn't quite understand the question. What have you done with my coffin?

VANGELA

Same answer. Nothing. Nada. Zip.

VOLUPTUA

Are you pretending you know nothing about it?

VANGELA

Now you're catching on. I'm not in charge of coffins. Therefore, I know nothing about any coffin of yours.

VOLUPTUA

Then who does know?

VANGELA

I have no idea and furthermore, I'm not at all interested. However, I must say I do enjoy the sight of a vampire of your prominence misplacing something as large as her sleeping accommodations.

VOLUPTUA

For a recruit, you have an extremely tart tongue. Wouldn't it serve you better and be more prudent for you to curb your rashness a bit?

VANGELA

Not to worry. I'm not going to be here too long.

VOLUPTUA

Your stay might turn out to be shorter than you think.

VANGELA

The shorter the better. I'm leaving vampireland.

VOLUPTUA

Really.

VANGELA

As soon as I get the answer on how to ex-transit, I'm out of here.

VOLUPTUA

Ex-transit! My, my. Big talk for a rookie.

VANGELA

You think I can't do it?

VOLUPTUA

I think you can't get the information without help. And that's only the first step in a long process.

VANGELA

Verlene will help me.

VOLUPTUA

Dream on. Even if she would assist you, Verlene isn't important enough in the power structure to have that knowledge.

VANGELA

Then I'll get Vladimir.

VOLUPTUA

(Laughs.)

Vladimir does whatever I say.

VANGELA

Hah. A lot you know. Vladimir is his own man.

VOLUPTUA (amused)

Only in certain areas.

VANGELA

You forget the 'net. I found out about ex-transit there. I'm sure I can learn how to achieve it there, too. Everything is eventually on the web.

VOLUPTUA

Eventually may be too late in your case. Besides, I doubt very much that information will be on the 'net when you make your search.

VANGELA

What arrogance. You can't erase things on the web.

VOLUPTUA

Can't I? You forget vampires have many resources unknown to mortals. Our powers are as effective against twenty-first century technology as they ever were against the crude inventions of past ages.

VANGELA

That's absurd.

VOLUPTUA

Scoff if you wish. Those mysterious system glitches and crashes on your laptop and Palm Pilot? They aren't all due to the capriciousness of their electrical cells and batteries.

VANGELA

You're not convincing me. Anyway, I can always go to Vancinio.

VOLUPTUA

(Laughs.)

Vancinio thinks you should be squashed like the miserable little weevil you are. Your best opportunity for getting the information you want is to cooperate with me.

VANGELA

You know how to ex-transit?

VOLUPTUA

Of course.

VANGELA

Why would I be dumb enough to think you'd help me?

VOLUPTUA

We could help each other.

VANGELA

You want me to vamp someone? Seduction is your racket. Besides, I'd never be able to get up that head of steam, the way you do.

VOLUPTUA

I'm talking a fair swap. I get your help in certain projects here -- picketing the government, standing up for our rights. Helping right the wrongs people have inflicted on vampires throughout the centuries.

VANGELA

And what do I get?

VOLUPTUA

You get your dear Van Helsing. For a mortal lifetime of those sweaty couplings you so ardently crave. What could be fairer than that?

VANGELA

Leave Van out of this.

VOLUPTUA

Oh, it's Van, is it? Why should I? You afraid I'd bewitch him?

VANGELA

He means nothing to you.

VOLUPTUA

You're right about that. He's a loser.

VANGELA

Then why bother with him?

VOLUPTUA

Get my coffin for me and help with those projects I mentioned and I'll consider leaving him for you.

VANGELA

No way. I don't trust you. You're like the scorpion who asked the turtle to carry him across the lake because he couldn't swim. The scorpion assured the turtle he wouldn't sting him. But when they got half-way across, the scorpion stung. Which meant they would both drown. When the turtle cried out, "Why did you sting me when you promised not to?", the scorpion replied, "I can't help myself. Stinging is my nature."

VOLUPTUA

A pretty story. But it has nothing to do with me. Will you join me or not?

VANGELA

Never.

VOLUPTUA

You insolent little flea. Scorpion, am I? You'll rue the day you crossed me! Van Helsing will be mine!

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VANCINIO, VLADIMIR, VOLUPTUA
and VERLENE in conference
mode.

VLADIMIR

I've told you I'll take care of this embarrassment.

VANCINIO

Harassment? I understand harassment has become a
serious problem.

VLADIMIR

I don't understand why you two keep after me. I'll do
this when the time is right, and not before.

VERLENE

I could have told you that.

VOLUPTUA

I can't believe we're wasting so much time on how to
get rid of a puny recruit when we need to face the
real issues plaguing vampires today. Can we just
settle this simple question of eliminating a noxious
recruit and get on with important matters needing our
attention?

VANCINIO

(To VLADIMIR.)

The only reason that young'un is still here rather
than long gone is that you are her sponsor.

VERLENE

You better believe it.

VANCINIO

As her sponsor you are entitled to choose the method
of her expulsion: the stake, fire, or decapitation.
So, my advice to you is to quit your shilly-shallying
and get on with it.

VLADIMIR

I can't agree with the choices you present for her expulsion. Each is too closely associated with us. Too risky in case the body is found.

VOLUPTUA

What a feeble rationalization you present for inaction. This pretty little recruit has certainly gotten to you.

VLADIMIR

I've never chosen violence over civilized behavior.

VERLENE

I told her about the bat blood bath. She was pretty annoyed about that. That's not violent. Except to the bats.

VLADIMIR

That hasn't worked in centuries. And rarely worked even then as a means of eliminating misfits.

VERLENE

Then why not tell her about the "Ex-transit Potion"?

VLADIMIR

That would be the best decision.

VANCINIO

Don't bet on it. The person ex-transits in a coma.

VLADIMIR

Right. And if it succeeds, we can do away with her without a struggle.

VANCINIO

And if she doesn't properly mix the potion?

VLADIMIR

She will undoubtedly do it correctly.

VANCINIO

If you insist on foregoing foolproof methods, I'd say use the Transylvanian Riddle.

VERLENE

What is that?

VLADIMIR

Isn't that risky? What if she succeeds?

VANCINIO

Not a chance. No one has ever solved the Transylvanian Riddle. I'm the only person who knows the answer ... and I keep it safe right here near my heart.

(Pats his breast pocket.)

In case I forget.

VLADMIR

A wonderfully safe place.

VOLUPTUA

A simple stake through the heart would get rid of her.

VLADIMIR

Yes. And draw those ugly minions of the law. No, these two solutions have served us well through the centuries. We'll stick with them if she continues to resist staying.

VOLUPTUA

Oh, she'll resist. She's in love. But it's not going to do her much good.

VLADIMIR

Why is that?

VOLUPTUA

Never mind. You'll see.

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

SETTING: Showroom of the Van Helsing Funeral Home and Casket Emporium.

AT RISE: VOLUPTUA is examining coffins when VAN HELSING enters, his arms loaded with copious files. Steam swirls sensuously about VOLUPTUA.

VAN HELSING

Hello there. Just let me put these folders down and I'll be right with you.

VOLUPTUA

Take your time. I'm in no hurry.

VAN HELSING

(Places files on top of cabinet.)

Now. Could you give me some idea of what kind of accommodations you require?

VOLUPTUA

Oh, I'm not here to purchase burial equipment.

VAN HELSING

No? Then what ...

VOLUPTUA

Why am I here?

VAN HELSING

Yes. We don't usually get to see people who have no interest in our products.

VOLUPTUA

I understand you're a very interesting man.

VAN HELSING

(Preens.)

My mother always told me that.

VOLUPTUA

And I hear you're renowned as the world's foremost expert in hunting down vampires.

VAN HELSING

Ah! My reputation precedes me. Hunting vampires is my life's work. Tracking the loathsome creatures and killing them. But you ... could you be interested ... are you too a vampire tracker?

VOLUPTUA

You could say that.

VAN HELSING

Imagine. Then we have something in common. It's not often I find someone with whom I can share my life's passion.

VOLUPTUA

Sharing passion is very important in life.

VAN HELSING

This is so exciting. Meeting you is a special day for me.

VOLUPTUA

Yes. And for me.

VAN HELSING

Have you always been interested in vampire?

VOLUPTUA

Since early adulthood. But tell me, aren't you feeling a little bit dizzy? Don't you notice anything different?

VAN HELSING

(Looks around.)

There does seem to be quite a bit of steam in here.

VOLUPTUA

And do you feel a bit woozy? Maybe a little light-headed?

VAN HELSING

Woozy? Never. I have the constitution of a horse.

VOLUPTUA

Not the least bit faint?

VAN HELSING

Nope. But this steam. Is that a medical condition?

VOLUPTUA

Certainly not.

VAN HELSING

Excuse me. I didn't mean to offend. I just thought ... my family background is medical ... my great grandfather ... the first Van Helsing ... so naturally I thought ...

VOLUPTUA

It's not a medical condition.

VAN HELSING

Fascinating. You must admit it's unusual. Could it be the result of a vitamin deficiency?

VOLUPTUA

No.

VAN HELSING

Possibly a pituitary anomaly.

VOLUPTUA

Not at all.

VAN HELSING

Is it hereditary? It looks uncomfortable.

VOLUPTUA

Let's get back to the subject of stalking vampires. I could help you there.

VAN HELSING

Can you control it at will? Turn it on and off? Or is it an autonomic nervous system reaction?

VOLUPTUA

You know, no one has ever quizzed me on this before.

VAN HELSING

You might want to see a specialist -- but just what specialty would be hard to say -- whether medical -- perhaps a plumber.

VOLUPTUA

(Laughs.)

That's so sweet. You're really rather innocent, aren't you?

VAN HELSING

Sweet?

VOLUPTUA

Your response to me --

VAN HELSING

What about it?

VOLUPTUA

It's very unusual. Unless they're wearing protective eyewear, big he men swoon when they look at me. Even pass out.

VAN HELSING

Is that a fact. You certainly are attractive. But I must tell you in all honesty I'm sworn to another. I'm in love with a wonderful young woman.

VOLUPTUA

Ah. Love.

VAN HELSING

You mentioned eyes. Mine are weak. Kept me out of the armed services. I have to wear UV contacts.

VOLUPTUA

Contacts. Love. Now I understand. Vangela.

VAN HELSING

You know Vangela?

VOLUPTUA

We share some similar interests.

VAN HELSING

Funny. She never mentioned you. Or tracking vampires. Do you think she shares that interest?

VOLUPTUA

No--o. I'd say her interest in vampires doesn't go that far.

VAN HELSING

Pity. She's a lovely person despite that shortcoming.

VOLUPTUA

So, we won't take her along with us when we go to New Jersey.

VAN HELSING

New Jersey?

VOLUPTUA

The home of a huge nest of vampires I know of. Just awaiting your ravishments. What fun we'll have!

VAN HELSING

Excellent! When can we leave?

VOLUPTUA

Unfortunately, we'll have to wait 'til I return from an important conference I'm attending in Geneva next week.

VAN HELSING

Oh.

VOLUPTUA

Don't be disappointed. This will give you time to get all your gear together -- and say goodbye to Vangela. You don't want to upset her by leaving abruptly.

VAN HELSING

Vangela. Right. You don't think ...

VOLUPTUA

That she'd be jealous? Of our going away together?

(Laughs.)

Of course not.

VAN HELSING

I wouldn't want her to get the wrong impression about us.

VOLUPTUA

Don't worry. I'm sure she'll understand. In fact, I'll explain everything to her.

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 3

SETTING: Interior vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VANGELA and VERLENE are seated on comfortable chairs. VERLENE is applying makeup during the exchange between the two. But we don't see the completed makeup until the end of their scene.

VANGELA

But you don't understand. It's not supposed to be like this. I'm a vampire!

VERLENE

Honey, I'm a Presbyterian. But you don't hear me going around whining about it.

VANGELA

That's not what I mean.

VERLENE

You're not religious?

VANGELA

It has nothing to do with religion. It's just my life here is falling apart. I need to ex-transit really soon to avoid serious trouble with Voluptua. And I find out you lied to me big time about how to do it.

(We hear a hubbub off stage. VAN HELSING runs across the stage, fleeing from VLADIMIR who chases him with a large meat axe.)

VAN HELSING

Out of my way!

VLADIMIR

I will kill you to pieces!

(VAN HELSING and VLADIMIR disappear off stage.)

VLADIMIR (off)

Hah!

(A heavy thump from offstage.)

VAN HELSING (off)

Missed!

VANGELA

(Ignoring the fleeing men.)

You know how important ex-transit is to me.

VERLENE

Bat blood bath didn't work out, huh? I'm sorry.

VANGELA

I thought you were my friend. Instead, you lied about the one thing I care about. Becoming mortal. Why? Why?

VERLENE

Hey, kid. For what it's worth, I didn't lie deliberately. I didn't know you were going to take this so seriously.

VANGELA

Oh. That makes it all right? You think that forgives such a big mistake? I'll never forgive you. Never.

VERLENE

I understand how you feel.

VANGELA

No, you don't. You don't care about anything. You don't feel anything. You're pleased that you don't feel. You're pleased that you don't care. You think it's smart. Well, I think it's dumb.

(Another hubbub. This time it is VLADIMIR fleeing from VAN HELSING who is carrying a wooden lance.)

VLADIMIR

Look out!

VAN HELSING

I will skewer you!

(Again, they continue across the stage and off.)

VAN HELSING (off)

Yahoo!

(A swishing sound followed by a boing.)

VLADIMIR (off)

Ha-ha. My turn again!

VERLENE

What's going on?

VANGELA (annoyed)

Oh, it's some kind of guy thing. Those two get carried away with trying to outdo one another.

VERLENE

As far as I knew, bat blood was necessary for ex-transit.

VANGELA

Tell me another whopper.

VERLENE

It just happened to be Transylvanian bat blood that was required. I just recently learned that even then, ex-transit didn't always work.

VANGELA

Now where would I get Transylvanian bats in this place.

VERLENE

You wouldn't. You couldn't. There's only one Transylvanian bat left in the whole world and it's in a private zoo somewhere in the depths of the Transylvanian mountains.

VANGELA

You must think I'm pretty gullible. How could there be only one bat left -- only one? Sounds crazy to me.

VERLENE

We've both learned something here. You, that it had to be a particular kind of bat blood, which happens to be no longer available.

VERLENE (Continued)

And I, that even with Transylvanian bats, sometimes ex-transit fails to happen.

VANGELA

I should have known nothing would work for me. I'm just not cut out for getting what I want here.

VERLENE

What are you saying?

VANGELA

Even if we forget about ex-transit and Peter and Voluptua, I'm close to washing out as a vampire. Starting with not being able to scare people into submission so I can suck their blood.

VERLENE

Are you still yammering about your failures as a vampire? How many are you up to now? Let's see: you're inept ...

VANGELA

I am.

VERLENE

And you can't drink blood without getting it all over yourself ...

VANGELA

I can't.

VERLENE

You feel faint just looking at blood ...

VANGELA

I do.

VERLENE

And you're afraid of the dark ...

VANGELA

That's true.

VERLENE

You're allergic to all that centuries-old dust in your coffin ...

VANGELA

I am, I am.

VERLENE

You certainly sneeze as though you are. So how many are we up to now? Five? Six? I lose count.

VANGELA

I don't know. But I have a bigger problem than any of those. And I don't know how to solve it.

VERLENE

Let me guess. You've run afoul of our lovely enchantress.

VANGELA

She's putting the moves on Van.

VERLENE

Probably wants an extra coffin mate. Her own coffin was delivered today. The lady certainly travels in style. It's a real beauty. And she and Vlad are doing double duty keeping it warm.

VANGELA

But what am I going to do about her?

VERLENE

Not much you can do. I told you what she's like.

VANGELA

I wonder if I could put something in her coffin that would get rid of her. Garlic? Line it with garlic puree?

VERLENE

Get rid of Voluptua? Vladimir's dream girl? Don't even think about it.

VANGELA

But I've got to do something! Can't you help me out here? It would make up for your having lied before. I need to find some way to banish her before she tells Van I'm a vampire and ruins whatever future I might have with him.

VERLENE

Look, kiddo. I have to get along with Vladimir. You see how he is around her. Totally ga-ga. He thinks she's the most fascinating creature in the world and she's his. I'm truly sorry the bat blood thing didn't work out for you. But I'm out of this.

VANGELA

So, you're leaving me on my own. Abandoning me.

VERLENE

'Fraid so.

VANGELA

Some friend you are.

VERLENE

I don't like leaving you in the lurch, but I've got to look out for my own skin.

VANGELA

And my skin doesn't count.

VERLENE

I didn't say that. I didn't mean that.

VANGELA

Oh, sure. I understand.

VERLENE

Don't be so bloody understanding. Yell at me a little so I won't feel so guilty. And I haven't felt guilty since I lost my virginity the first time under the reign of Pope ... Pope ... It was ages ago. Actually centuries.

VANGELA

It's just this whole situation is driving me nuts.

(Another hubbub. VAN HELSING again fleeing from VLADIMIR, who brandishes a crossbow.)

VAN HELSING

Gangway!

VLADIMIR

I'll get you this time!

(As before, they streak across and off.
We hear a characteristic twang from the
crossbow.)

VLADIMIR (off)

Curses!

VAN HELSING (off)

Not even close!

VANGELA

See what I mean? Vladimir wants me to lure Peter here so he can stab him, or shoot him, or otherwise kill him. And Peter wants me to lure Vladimir to his emporium so he can stab or burn or otherwise kill Vladimir. They're both deranged.

VERLENE

Just ignore them both.

VANGELA

I can't! I'm in love with Peter. And I know that Voluptua has decided he's her next trophy.

VERLENE

What'd I tell you? You'd better just bite him and get him out of her grasp. Then you can be together through eternity. There you go! That would solve both your Peter and Voluptua problems.

VANGELA

I don't want to spend eternity with him.

VERLENE

You don't? What kind of passing love fancy is this?

VANGELA

It's not a passing fancy. I've told you before. I want to spend a human lifetime with Van. Not a vampire eternity. I want to walk in the moonlight ...

VERLENE

Hey, you can do that now. As a matter of fact, that's about the only place you can walk. Certainly can't take a jog around the lake in the morning sun.

VANGELA

Why do I bother talking to you. You're just like all the others. Making fun of me. Well, I'll show you. I'll figure out some way to get rid of that witch.

(Suddenly notices that VERLENE is applying makeup.)

Where are you going that you need to be made up?

(VERLENE turns and we see the makeup she is applying is not the usual glowing colors we see on human females. She looks ghastly, with ashy-grey skin and the sunken eyes of a cadaver.)

VERLENE

Honey, you didn't think we looked like this naturally, did you? It takes skill and plenty of time to achieve this vampire ideal. Be a good kid and someday I'll teach you how to get the same ghoulish effect.

(Once again, a hubbub occurs off stage. The two combatants race across the stage once more. VLADIMIR ahead, VAN HELSING chasing and carrying large sharp wooden stakes. He holds one on high, ready to throw.)

VLADIMIR

Out of my way!

VAN HELSING

This is it!

(As soon as VLADIMIR is out of sight, VAN HELSING hurls the stake with all his might. We hear it strike with a clonk, which is followed by a terrible scream.)

VAN HELSING

There! Gotcha this time!

(VAN HELSING runs off stage. We hear gasping from off stage. Then a figure staggers on, impaled on the stake. He falls dead at VERLENE's feet. VLADIMIR and VAN HELSING run on stage.)

VLADIMIR

(To VAN HELSING.)

You fool! You've killed our blood bank delivery man!

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 4

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VANCINIO, VLADIMIR and
VOLUPTUA are in conference.

VANCINIO

It's time for action, sonny. No more of this molly-coddling of recruits.

VLADIMIR

What is the rush?

VOLUPTUA

Sweetheart. We've waited. And waited. What's to be gained by delaying longer? She's not going to change her mind about staying.

VANCINIO

Mind? I mind that you've done nothing. Nothing. That cannot be tolerated in an administrator. Take action or you're out.

VLADIMIR

Surely you don't mean that, sir. After all the centuries we've been together.

VANCINIO

You've become wishy-washy. Can't have that. Act or be replaced. That's the crux of it.

VOLUPTUA

You say you're not interested in her. But your actions belie your words. Show me you don't care a fig about her. Get rid of her. Or I won't be back. I'll never return.

VLADIMIR

My love! I have absolutely no interest in this insignificant little creature. I can think of no action on my part that would give you cause to think she is of any personal concern to me.

VOLUPTUA

Good. That's a bit reassuring. So, before you send her into never-never land, you won't mind having her do one last chore for me, will you?

VANCINIO

Chore? It's not a chore to do your duty about this recruit. Don't tell me that. I certainly don't want to hear either of you telling me that duty is a chore.

VLADIMIR

There's a misunderstanding here, sir. Voluptua is asking me to have Vangela do something for her before we eliminate this recruit.

VANCINIO

Well, why didn't you say that instead of complaining about your duty?

VLADIMIR

I don't believe I -- let me say, to you both, I'll follow your desires. I'll rid the compound of this recruit.

(To VOLUPTUA.)

But first, I'd like to know what you would have me ask her to do.

VOLUPTUA

I would ask her myself -- you know I'm not at all shy in asking for help -- but the poor creature has taken a violent dislike to me. I certainly don't know what I might have done that could make her react that way. I've gone out of my way to help her. I can't think of a thing I've said that could be upsetting to her. So, I thought if you would ask her to do this teensy little thing, she'd more willingly comply.

VLADIMIR

Anything for you, my sweet.

VOLUPTUA

My travel vouchers to Geneva are completely messed up. Vampire Air tells me there are no flights into Geneva that will get me and my coffin there in time for the conference. Such incompetence! So, since Vangela has a computer, I'm sure it would be a simple matter for her to find me an alternate flight on some other carrier.

VOLUPTUA (Continued)

Would you be a dear and coax her into doing it? You're so good with young women.

VLADIMIR

Think no more about it. I'll put her right on it. But I hate to see you leave so soon. You just got here. And now you're bounding off again.

VOLUPTUA

It's hard for me too, love. But we still have a little more snuggling time together.

VANCINIO

So, we're all agreed? You're axing that second-rate recruit tonight?

VLADIMIR

Tonight. Consider it done.

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 5

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VANGELA is researching a big tome labeled "Transit-Ex". She compares what she finds with her laptop at Ghouls.com. VLADIMIR enters.

VLADIMIR

There you are. We must talk. Put aside that toy. It's of no help. Information you find there is romantic fantasy. As a reliable guide for action, it is sheer hogwash.

VANGELA

It beats anything I've gotten from Verlene or Renfield.

VLADIMIR

Don't depend for help on those who are not in a position to know. I'm the person with the information you seek.

VANGELA

But you've said repeatedly that I can't have it. So why are you teasing me by telling me again how you know what I want -- and how you'll never tell me?

VLADIMIR

Circumstances have changed. And we must change with them.

VANGELA

What's this? Philosophy 101? I'm not in that class yet.

VLADIMIR

Child. Child. Curb your tongue. I've decided to help you achieve ex-transit.

VANGELA

Is this a joke? Some form of vampire humor I'm not acquainted with?

VLADIMIR

I do not joke about important matters. I have decided to give you the information you need to attain ex-transit. The rest is up to you.

VANGELA

Wait a minute. You have truly changed your mind? Today is not April Fool's Day, is it?

(VERLENE enters.)

VLADIMIR

You would willingly give up this wonderful life for that of a mere mortal? Nothing can entice you to be happy with us?

VANGELA

Nothing.

VLADIMIR

If we should assist you in your desire and you return to your former state, you would not be so foolish as to bad mouth your vampire colleagues, would you?

VANGELA

(Hardly able to contain her glee.)

Absolutely not. I'd tell everyone how good you are and how kind.

VLADIMIR

You wouldn't have to go that far. You must understand that this is a tricky process. And it is not always a successful one.

VANGELA

I don't care! I don't care! I'm ready to try it.

VLADIMIR

I am telling you this because we want no long involved lawsuits in case of failure. No litigation.

VANGELA

No. No. Of course not.

VLADIMIR

Very well.

(Sigh.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

Let us begin. The actual method of ex-transit in this case is a potion. Which you drink.

(Beat.)

Then maybe I'll get some peace of mind.

(VANCINIO enters.)

VANCINIO

Piece of what? What kind of piece? I said ...

VLADIMIR

Maestro. I'm discussing with Vangela how she is to return to mortal form.

VANCINIO

Okay. But what method are you proposing? I say what method?

VLADIMIR

The potion.

VANCINIO (scornfully)

Potion. No, no. If you insist on tampering with tradition, it must be the riddle. The riddle is the only proper way to effect ex-transit. The individual who can solve the riddle earns ex-transit. Unlike those milksops who drink their way back to humanity.

VANGELA

I'm willing to try both. Or one after the other. However you want to organize it.

VANCINIO

Bah! Why are we talking to this neophyte about ex-transit. In my day, that wasn't an option for recruits. World's just going to hell in a handbucket.

VLADIMIR

That may be. But this one will not. Shall you tell Vangela the potion ingredients or shall I?

VANCINIO (sulkily)

This is your show. And after I made that harrowing trip over the Bermuda Triangle just to help you people. This is the thanks I get.

VLADIMIR

Let's see. How exactly does it go? Oh yes ...

An eye of newt. A toe of frog.
 Purple mushrooms from a log.
 One howl of wolf.
 Two flakes of rust.
 Season with some whiffle dust.
 Cook them well, and stir the lot,
 To make a potion, nice and hot.
 The fire burns! The cauldron bubbles!
 Down the drink to end your troubles!!!

VANGELA

Fantastic! But where am I going to get all the ingredients?

VLADIMIR

Ah. A test of your resourcefulness. You must find them yourself.

VANGELA (sing-songily)

Eye of newt. Toe of frog. Purple mushrooms from a log.
 Poetry. It's poetry. It's okay if I write this down,
 isn't it? I wouldn't want to mess up because I forgot
 something.

VERLENE

(Hands VANGELA a piece of paper.)

Here it is, kid. I just copied it down for you.

VANCINIO

While she spends her time searching for those ingredients, she might as well be thinking about the riddle. It may take her a lo-o-o-ng time trying to figure it out.

(Cackles.)

Not easy finding newt eyes and frog toes these days.

VLADIMIR

True enough, sir. Will you explain the riddle?

VANCINIO

It's simplicity itself. And you won't have to write it down on paper to remember it. Of course, if you want the answer, that's more complicated.

(Pats his pocket.)

VANCINIO (Continued)

I carry the answer here in case I need to refresh my memory.

VANGELA

How does the riddle go?

VANCINIO

Go? I don't need to go. Are you going somewhere?

VANGELA

Would you give me the words to the riddle?

VANCINIO

Certainly. Isn't that what we were talking about? I can't think your short attention span will serve you well back in mortal form.

VLADIMIR

The riddle.

VANCINIO

What is short and also long?

What is long and also short?

VANGELA

That's it? That's all there is to the riddle? What is long and short. That's easy. Nothing. It must be nothing. Nothing lasts forever. Right? Did I guess it?

VERLENE

That answer would be small and long, not short and long.

VANCINIO

Wait a minute. There's more to it.

If your answer isn't wrong,
Your condition will revert
To being human.

Guess this riddle if you dare.
You'll get your wish, but do take care.
Within your chosen answer lies
The key to when a vampire dies.

VANCINIO (Continued)

But if your answer isn't right,
All the evils of perdition
Will assemble in the night
To destroy you -- that's their mission.

VANGELA

Now is that all of it?

VANCINIO (cackles)

Confuses you, doesn't it? Of course, that's all of it.
It looks simple but it's very difficult. You'll never
figure it out. But if you guess wrong, it'll be the
evils of perdition for you. So be careful. You may
wish you'd never started down this road.

VANGELA

(To VERLENE.)

What is short and also long? Do you know?

VERLENE

Hey, kid. This is your show. Even if I knew, which I
don't, I wouldn't tell you. Not part of my job
description. Besides, I don't want any curses hanging
over me. This one you solve yourself.

VANGELA

Oh, all right, if you're going to act that way.

(Musing to herself.)

What is long and also short?

(RENFIELD enters, looking at the floor.
His eyes bulge and he pounces on
something.)

RENFIELD

A centipede!

VANGELA (horrified)

I didn't ask you to tell me! Is the answer a
centipede? I hope I won't be penalized for something I
didn't do. I'm supposed to figure it out for myself, I
know.

VLADIMIR

Don't worry, my dear. 'Centipede' is not the correct
answer. No curse will fall on you in any event.

VLADIMIR (Continued)

But you see that the simple riddle is more difficult than it would appear, yes?

VANGELA

Yes.

VERLENE

A dachshund is long and short.

VANGELA

Why are you doing this to me? He said I have to solve the riddle myself. It's not a dachshund, is it?

VLADIMIR

No, it is not. Now that you have both proven methods of ex-transit firmly fixed in your mind, we will leave you to gather your potion ingredients and ponder the riddle, while we engage in higher pursuits. Come, Renfield, help Vancinio and me find those golf clubs.

(RENFIELD, VLADIMIR and VANCINIO exit.)

VANGELA

Is this riddle for real? It seems silly and trivial, but that stuff about all the evils of perdition is scary. What do you think?

VERLENE

Honey, thinking isn't in my job description.

VANGELA

You're not going to help me, are you?

VERLENE

You heard 'em. In this, you're on your own.

VANGELA

Do you know of any other way? To ex-transit?

VERLENE

Nope.

VANGELA

You'll help me with the potion, won't you? There's no curse hanging over help for that.

VERLENE

Sure, kid. Let's get to it.

(VANGELA and VERLENE exit.)

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 6

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VOLUPTUA and VLADIMIR in another steamy embrace.

VOLUPTUA

You're a miracle worker.

VLADIMIR

You exaggerate. If I could work miracles, you wouldn't be leaving. But I like to hear compliments.

VOLUPTUA

You are so dear. You are my favorite vampire in all the world.

VLADIMIR

Then why do you leave me? You're always leaving.

VOLUPTUA

I always come back. Thanks to your persuading Vangela to book me on another airline, I'll get to Geneva totally refreshed. I'm sleeping through the flight in my very own coffin!

VLADIMIR

She does have some redeeming skills. Why couldn't we send her rather than you?

VOLUPTUA

You know why.

VLADIMIR

I can't bear to have you go.

VOLUPTUA

Of course you can. Don't be melodramatic.

VLADIMIR

Melodrama is all that is left for me now.

VOLUPTUA

Listen to me. You have me. I'll always be yours. I couldn't belong to anyone else.

VLADIMIR

You're just trying to soft soap me now that you're leaving.

VOLUPTUA

No. I'm telling you the truth about me. No matter where I go, or who I meet, I'll always be yours. I want no other.

VLADIMIR

A pretty goodbye speech.

VOLUPTUA

Not a speech. It's how I feel about you.

VLADIMIR

But you leave. Over and over.

VOLUPTUA

You are the only man I ever knew who loved me for myself. The only man who accepted me as a person, not just a beauty. I shall always treasure that. It means more to me than you can possibly know.

VLADIMIR

Oh, I like your beauty. Here and here and here and here. I can't imagine it being improved on. I wouldn't want you to think I don't like your beauty. Or never noticed.

VOLUPTUA

You goose. Don't twist my words. Just remember. I'm yours. Always yours. 'Til the end of time.

VLADIMIR

But you're leaving. Again.

VOLUPTUA

Yes. But I'll be back. I'll always come back.

VLADIMIR

(Big sigh.)

I'll walk you to your coffin.

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 7

SETTING: Interior of vampire quarters.

AT RISE: VANGELA is at a work counter, pouring over her notes regarding the magic potion. Her squeamishness shows through shudders and facial grimaces as she bends to the task at hand. VERLENE looks over VANGELA's shoulder as VANGELA reads the recipe.

VANGELA

Before I forget, I want to tell you I got rid of that problem I had.

VERLENE

What problem?

VANGELA

What problem? You know -- the temptress?

VERLENE

That problem. Pretty fast worker. How'd you manage that?

VANGELA

I'm actually very proud of myself. Vlad asked me to book Voluptua on a commercial airline -- with her coffin -- to Geneva. So-o-o

VERLENE

Yeah, yeah. That's just sending her to Geneva.

VANGELA

I'm not that dumb. She's on her way to Transylvania. Home of the mob of angry women who wanted to tear her apart.

VERLENE

You think they'll still be waiting for her after all this time?

VANGELA

I emailed ahead that she was coming.

VERLENE

Oh, you're wicked. You really have the makings of a good vampire. Sure you don't want to stay?

VANGELA

Not on your life. I'm going back. Now. What does it say here in the recipe:

An eye of newt ... A toe of frog.
Purple mushrooms from a log.
One howl of wolf ...

How in the devil am I going to get the howl of a wolf into this concoction? Are you sure this concentrated powder is actually a real wolf howl?

(VERLENE shrugs.)

VANGELA (Continued)

Two flakes of rust...
Season with some whiffle dust...
Cook them well, and stir the lot,
To make a potion, nice and hot.
The fire burns! The cauldron bubbles!
Drink it down to end your troubles!!

(VANGELA puts the recipe on the counter, pushes up her sleeves and dons rubber gloves.)

VANGELA (Continued)

Yuck! Eye of newt! Who dreams up these things?
(She drops a small object into a pot on the stove and stirs.)
Toe of frog! Arghh! Disgusting.

VERLENE

I could have told you that.

VANGELA

Thanks for giving me a source for these weird ingredients. I'd never have found them otherwise. The Three Witches Delicatessen, Bakery & Take Out isn't listed on the 'net. That's a truly repulsive place.

(VANGELA adds another small object to the pot.)

VERLENE

Don't forget these beauties.

(VERLENE hands VANGELA the mushrooms.)

VANGELA

Purple mushrooms. Lucky for me these were growing on a log just outside our door here.

(She handles them gingerly as she adds them to the pot.)

Doesn't say how many, but they look disgusting so it shouldn't take a lot.

VERLENE

On the other hand, if a little is good, a lot should be better. And you've got plenty.

(VANGELA dumps a lot of chopped mushrooms into the pot.)

VANGELA

There we go.

(She puts the wolf powder into the pot. We hear the passionate howl of a wolf. Next she takes tweezers to add two more small ingredients.)

VANGELA (Continued)

That's the lot. Newt eye. Frog toe. Log mushrooms. Wolf howl. Rust flakes. Couldn't find any whiffle dust. But what's here is loathsome enough to etch steel. It should do the trick.

(She stirs the pot, from which clouds of acrid-looking steam drift upward.)

VANGELA (Continued)

The pot boils! That's what it calls for.

VERLENE

You've got it made now, kid. Nothing to do but wait for the full moon.

(VANGELA rummages in the cupboard,
looks puzzled.)

VANGELA

Did Vladimir say to drink it from a cat's skull or a
bat's skull?

VERLENE

What difference does it make?

VANGELA

The difference between success and failure! Between
returning to human form and remaining undead for ...
who knows how long?

VERLENE

Gotcha. I'm sure he said bat's skull.

VANGELA

You're really sure?

VERLENE

Positive.

VANGELA

Okay, but it better be the right skull, or you'll have
to put up with my anger for centuries.

VERLENE

Gotcha.

VANGELA

And tonight I'll drink it down to end my troubles.

(As VANGELA pours the fetid frothing
mixture into the skull, we hear the
voices of VLADIMIR and VANCINIO
approaching.)

VLADIMIR

One thing at a time. I'm doing the best I can.

VANCINIO

What's that? Speak up. You're mumbling again.

VANGELA

Yikes, this is hot! And it looks like swill.

(VANGELA settles the skull on the counter, hears the approaching voices.)

VANGELA (Continued)

Someone's coming!

VLADIMIR (louder)

I said, I'm doing the best I can. First, Vangela, then Van Helsing.

VANGELA

It's Vladimir and Vancinio. Don't you dare let them know what we've been doing.

(VANGELA and VERLENE rush off. VLADIMIR and VANCINIO enter.)

VANCINIO

You were always headstrong, Vladimir. Smart but headstrong. I never liked that in you.

(Seeing the skull.)

Ah, my vitamins. Verlene remembered. Now there's a top notch vampire. Good looking, too. You think I'm too old to notice? Huh!

(VANCINIO drinks the potion, smacks his lips, sighs and looks pleased. Suddenly he grabs his chest, and falls inert to the floor.)

VLADIMIR

(Examining the skull and the pot.)

What on earth?

(He kneels by VANCINIO and shakes him.)

Vancinio! Vancinio!

(He shakes VANCINIO's cheeks.)

Answer me!

(VANGELA and VERLENE return.)

VANGELA

What happened?

VLADIMIR

(Points to the skull.)

He drank ...

(VERLENE points to the skull.)

VANGELA

(Points to the skull.)

He drank ...?

VLADIMIR

(Nods.)

Exactly. He drank from that skull. What was it?

VERLENE

(Pretending to investigate by looking into the pot.)

Hard to tell. Looks like a little thing with one tapioca eye and a kind of toe huddled among some mushrooms.

VLADIMIR

The poison potion? I mean ... the ex-transit potion?

VANGELA

(Understanding immediately that VLADIMIR meant it for her.)

Poi...? The ex-transit potion? Does that mean Vancinio will become human again? He looks like he's ended his troubles. See how peaceful ...

(We hear VAN HELSING's voice from off stage.)

VAN HELSING

Oh, Vangela! Where are you?

VLADIMIR

That fool! Quick, we must hide Vancinio. Help me.

(Together, VLADIMIR, VANGELA and VERLENE lift and drag VANCINIO into the next room where all the coffins are arrayed.)

VAN HELSING

(Still off stage.)

Vangela! It's important!

VLADIMIR

Here, put him in a coffin! That imbecile will be here soon.

(They quickly lower VANCINIO into one of the coffins. When they lower the lid, there is a loud drawn-out "boing" sound, followed by a muffled, rapidly fading scream.)

VLADIMIR (wide-eyed)

Oh no! Not Vancinio! Not Vancinio!

VANGELA

(Calling to VAN HELSING.)

I'm in here, Peter.

(VAN HELSING enters.)

VAN HELSING

There you are! I just found out they are trying to kill y...

(He sees VLADIMIR.)

What's going on? What's happening?

VANGELA

Vancinio has been stabbed through the heart!

VAN HELSING

Who did it? And where is Vancinio?

VANGELA

The coffin ... it was the coffin ... the one that ... your special coffin. Oh, Peter. Everything is going wrong.

VERLENE

Did you get the answer to the riddle? It's in his breast pocket, remember?

(VANGELA rushes to the coffin, throws back the lid, and removes the note. It has been slashed by the stake and is in bloody tatters.)

VLADIMIR

(Laughs.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

You'll never find the answer now, it's hopeless.

VAN HELSING

(Glares at VLADIMIR.)

Don't listen to this evil creature, Vangela! He's a vampire! You can't trust a thing he says. Don't let him near you!

VLADIMIR

You're going to listen to this puny specimen? He would say anything to lure you into trouble.

(Hisses.)

He's a Van Helsing.

VANGELA (distraught)

Why do you two quarrel all the time? You're driving me crazy. I hate both of you and your silly rivalry. Leave me alone. Just leave me alone.

(VANGELA rushes out.)

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 8

SETTING: The Van Helsing Casket
Emporium, showroom.

AT RISE: VANGELA enters, searching for
VAN HELSING. Her manner is
agitated.

VANGELA

Peter?

(No answer.)

Peter?

(Still no answer.)

Answer me! Peter!

(VANGELA starts to leave when VAN
HELSING enters.)

VANGELA

There you are. I have to talk to you.

VAN HELSING

And I you. I dreamt of you again last night, my love.

VANGELA (agitated)

Please. Don't say things like that. I must ...

VAN HELSING

You don't want to hear my dream of you? Of us?

VANGELA

Really, Peter, you're making this very hard.

VAN HELSING

Yesterday you seemed interested enough. What has
happened?

VANGELA

Everything. Everything that's gross that could happen
is what's happened.

(VANGELA bursts into tears.)

VAN HELSING

(Now very concerned about VANGELA's
tears.)

Here, what's the matter? Something I've done? Tell me.
I'll change it.

VANGELA

It's not you. And it's nothing that can be fixed.

(Her tears break out again.)

VAN HELSING

Is it my bullying you to help me trap Vladimir?

(VANGELA shakes her head vehemently
through tears.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

My chumminess with Renfield?

VANGELA

(Shakes her head again while continuing
to sob.)

I didn't know you were friendly with Renfield.

VAN HELSING

You know I'd do anything for you.

(Big wail from VANGELA.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

But I can't do anything about this unless I know
what's bothering you.

(No response.)

VANGELA

I can't bear to tell you. I thought I could, but I'm
sure I'll die before I can say it.

(Sobs.)

But the likelihood is I won't die. Ever.

VAN HELSING

(Not really registering what she has
said because he's so intent on his
solution to her problem.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

I'll bet I know what it is. It's my hatred of
vampires. And I know Vladimir is one. That must be it.
Am I right?

(VANGELA's only response is bigger
sobs.)

VANGELA

I'm sorry. I can't do this. I have to leave.

VAN HELSING

We can handle this. I love you. And I'm pretty sure
you love me. Whatever it is, we can face it together.
Just tell me what's upsetting you so.

VANGELA

I don't know how to say it.

VAN HELSING

Just start at the beginning. Take a deep breath.
Everything's going to be all right.

VANGELA

Nothing is going to be all right. Ever. Again.

(More sobs.)

VAN HELSING

Is Vladimir making sexual overtures?

(VANGELA shakes her head no.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

Vancinio?

(Again, VANGELA shakes her head no.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

I didn't think so. In his case, the deterrent would be
his age, rather than his libido. Still, you never can
tell with these randy old goats.

(Tenderly.)

Look at me.

(Beat.)

Tell me what's bothering you.

VANGELA

It's so difficult to say.

VAN HELSING

Just tell me. You'll feel better.

VANGELA

But I won't. I'll never feel better again. In fact, I'll probably never feel anything again. And nothing can be done about it.

(She sobs again.)

VAN HELSING

I'm sorry you're so distressed. You know I'll do whatever I can to help. But first, you must tell me your problem, so we can decide what to do.

VANGELA

I'm a vampire.

VAN HELSING

(Not understanding what she has said.)

You're a what?

VANGELA

A vampire. A lost soul. One of the undead. A creature of the night.

(More sobs.)

VAN HELSING

Surely not.

VANGELA

It's true. I tried everything I could find to discover how to become human again. So I could be with you, love you, live with you. But nothing worked. Nothing. No bathing in bat's blood, no solving dumb riddles or drinking a poisonous concoction. And now I know nothing ever will. There is no way to return to human form, and you will have to kill me. I can't stand the thought of living through eternity without you.

VAN HELSING (stunned)

A vampire.

VANGELA

I'm afraid so. And you hate vampires.

VAN HELSING

You are a vampire.

VANGELA

And you must kill me. If you love me, you must be the one who drives a stake through my heart so that I may be at peace and never infect anyone else throughout eternity.

VAN HELSING

Eternity.

VANGELA

Do this for me -- for the love you profess for me. I beg you.

VAN HELSING

Drive a stake through your dear heart?

VANGELA

You must.

VAN HELSING

When I dreamt we would be together through eternity, I was thinking of ordinary human eternity.

VANGELA

My dream too. But it can't be. I tried. Harder than I have tried for anything in my life. But I failed. It must not really be possible to return to a mortal state.

VAN HELSING

Probably not.

(Beat.)

I don't want to lose you. I want to keep you close forever. But I realize what must be done.

VANGELA

Then you'll do it?

VAN HELSING (reluctantly)

If I must.

VANGELA

Then do it now. Before I lose my courage.

VAN HELSING

First I must find mine.

VANGELA

Surely Vancinio would have made an exception in my case. And allowed me to return to a human state. Particularly since he wanted to get rid of me anyway.

VAN HELSING

When I look at you, my heart does cartwheels inside my chest and my knees buckle. How can I find the strength to put a stake through your heart?

VANGELA

You are the only one. It must be you.

VAN HELSING

(Deciding he must.)

Very well. But on one condition.

VANGELA

No conditions.

VAN HELSING

Then one request.

VANGELA

I'm not very powerful in the request-granting department. In fact, I'm pretty much a wash-out there too.

VAN HELSING

Not in my book. Never with me.

VANGELA

Wait. Isn't this scene backwards? Isn't it supposed to be the condemned person who gets the last request? That would be me rather than you. I am the one who is to die. You are going to go on living.

VAN HELSING

But I'm being condemned to be without you.

VANGELA

Without me.

VAN HELSING

I'll grant any request you choose to make.

VANGELA

But what of the request you asked me to grant?

VAN HELSING

I know now how I shall handle it. I'll take care of it before our last encounter. Do not worry. I'll take care of everything.

VANGELA

What about your courage? Have you found it?

VAN HELSING

It will be with me when I meet you here for the last time.

VANGELA

We cannot do this now and have done with it?

VAN HELSING

There are certain things I must do. Things I must prepare in advance. So, it cannot be done now. Besides, I cannot let go of you so soon. Grant us a few more minutes together as though we were ordinary lovers.

VANGELA

Then when will it be?

VAN HELSING

Let us meet at midnight.

VANGELA

At midnight. 'Til then. It sounds like an ordinary tryst.

VAN HELSING

If only it were.

VANGELA

Yes. If only. 'Til midnight.

VAN HELSING

'Til midnight.

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE 9

SETTING: The Van Helsing Funeral Home and Casket Emporium, showroom.

AT RISE: It is approaching midnight. VLADIMIR enters, smiling. He carefully inspects the coffins, discreetly marking one, then lounges against it to await VAN HELSING.

VAN HELSING enters, carrying a large bag. His mood is somber. He opens the bag and removes several long pointed stakes, placing them on a convenient shelf. Only then does he notice VLADIMIR.

VAN HELSING

Ah. I see you responded to my summons.

VLADIMIR

I give summonses. I do not respond to them.

VAN HELSING

But you are here.

VLADIMIR

Yes, of my own volition and intent. Look into my eyes.

(VLADIMIR gradually circles VAN HELSING until VAN HELSING's back is to the coffin that VLADIMIR marked.)

VAN HELSING

Ha! You think you can hypnotize me?

VLADIMIR

You have nothing to fear. Just look into my eyes.

VAN HELSING

I certainly have nothing to fear from you! I'm surrounded by my special protections.

VLADIMIR

You are so right. Just gaze into my eyes. Your future is assured!

VAN HELSING

(Growing woozy.)

My future ... is ... assured.

VLADIMIR

(Oozing confidence, speaking slowly.)

Ve-ry as-sur-ed. You will continue gazing into my eyes as you take a step backward.

VAN HELSING

(Doing as told.)

A ... step ... backward.

VLADIMIR

Ve-ry go-od! And another step backward.

(VANGELA enters and quickly sizes up the situation.)

VAN HELSING

An-other ... step ... back-ward ... An-other ... step ...

VANGELA

Peter! Stop!

(VANGELA's cry breaks the hypnotic spell. VAN HELSING awakens, leans forward to rub his eyes and shake himself awake. VLADIMIR whirls around, startled.)

VLADIMIR (furious)

You!

(VANGELA lunges at VLADIMIR, pushing him into the coffin as she shouts...)

VANGELA

Yes, Vladimir! It's Vangela, your inept recruit!

(VANGELA quickly closes the lid of the coffin, jumping on the lid to make sure it is closed.)

We hear a loud whanging sound and a terrible scream.)

VANGELA (Continued)

Quick, Peter. Where's your special caulking compound?

VAN HELSING (recovering)

Yes. We must seal him in immediately!

(They run caulking compound around the seams of the coffin.)

VAN HELSING (Continued)

You saved my life!

VANGELA

Yes. And I sealed my own fate.

VAN HELSING

Vangela. Are you sure you want ... you don't deserve ... a stake through your heart!

VANGELA

It's the only solution. We're like Romeo and Juliet. Tristan and Isolde. Fire and Water. We're destined to be separated, always and forever, by some monstrous barrier we can never overcome. If you love me, you'll save me from an eternity of loathsome existence as a vampire.

VAN HELSING

(Very solemnly.)

If it is the only way.

(Long pause.)

Are you ready?

(They move to a beautiful gilded casket that VAN HELSING has selected.)

VANGELA

As ready as I'll ever be.

(They embrace.)

Know that I shall love you forever and ever.

VAN HELSING

And I you.

(He helps VANGELA into the gilded casket and kisses her gently one last time. He raises the hammer to drive in the stake. Before he can pound in the stake, she rises up.)

VANGELA

You do understand why I want you to kill me? I couldn't bear to go on without you. For centuries. You know that a vampire's life is an eon.

(On the word "eon", lights flash on and off and bells ring. A sign, unseen by both VANGELA and VAN HELSING, drops from the ceiling reading "RIDDLE SOLVED".)

VAN HELSING (musing)

You know, "eon" is a peculiar word. Did it ever occur to you that it is a short word for a long time?

VANGELA

(Looking around.)

What's wrong with the electrical system?

VAN HELSING

Probably the electric company switching generators.

VANGELA

Oh.

(A longish pause.)

All right. I'm ready.

(VAN HELSING positions a stake against her heart and raises his hammer, ready to strike. Again, she rises up.)

VANGELA (Continued)

Just one more thing.

VAN HELSING

(Putting the stakes aside.)

Anything.

VANGELA

I don't want people to see me all mussed up. No lipstick. Hair a mess. Let me have a minute to fix my makeup.

VAN HELSING

Take all the time you wish.

VANGELA

Do you have a mirror handy?

VAN HELSING

I have mirrors everywhere. Why a mirror?
(He hands her a mirror from a side table.)
Vampires can't see themselves in mirrors.

VANGELA

(Peers into the mirror.)
I know. Just a habit, I suppose. But ...
(She looks at herself, attends to her makeup.)
What a mess! These bushy eyebrows ... I should have them waxed.

VAN HELSING

What did you say?

VANGELA

I said I need to have my brows ... waxed.

(Both realize what she has said.)

VAN HELSING

You saw yourself in the mirror?

VANGELA (delighted)

Yes!

VAN HELSING

My darling, it worked! Whatever you did, it worked!
You are mortal again.

VANGELA

Can it be?

(She looks in the mirror to confirm that she can see herself.)

VANGELA (Continued)

This is completely amazing.

(VANGELA laughs.)

VANGELA (Continued)

Now I can bite you whenever I wish and not be afraid how it will affect you.

VAN HELSING

My life is fulfilled. Vladimir is bested and my love returned to me. Oh, my darling, get out of there. Let's celebrate.

(VAN HELSING and VANGELA leave the emporium arm in arm, blissful looks on both faces. As they leave, RENFIELD runs on, panic in his voice.)

RENFIELD

Master! Master! Where are you? I'm not receiving you. Your message has faded out. What has happened? Are you all right?

(As lights begin to fade, we hear a wolf howl, then the creaking sound of a coffin lid opening. A hand appears as the lid rises. The stake in the lid, for it is VAN HELSING's vampire-killer coffin, is crumpled and shattered, as though it has hit something extremely hard. VLADIMIR steps from the casket. He brushes a thousand splinters from his tuxedo.)

VLADIMIR

Of course I'm all right. Why wouldn't I, the greatest of all vampires, be all right? My cunning, as usual, saved me. Poor little Vangela's spider web turned out to be a great investment.

(He points to his vest.)

I couldn't have gotten this Kevlar beauty without it.

(VLADIMIR bends down and tastes the now destroyed caulking sealant on the coffin.)

VLADIMIR (Continued)

As for that sacred caulking compound of Van Helsing's, it was child's play to substitute saltine crackers for the sacramental wafers. And shallots for garlic. A quite tasty but harmless combination. However, enough of my brilliance. Tomorrow is another night. For hunting old adversaries. And enjoying the charms of Voluptua.

(We hear another wolf howl as the lights fade.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY