

ACT ONE
SCENE THREE

[Lights up on VAN HELSING'S office, a sparse-looking industrial room with a desk, two chairs, a file cabinet, and a coat rack, on which are draped VAN HELSING'S hat and trench coat. It is late night, a week after Scene One. A neon sign flashes outside the window, casting the blinking multicolored shadow of Venetian blinds on the wall. Smoking, VAN HELSING is seated with his feet perched on his desk, looking forlorn. He drinks a shot of whiskey, then opens the empty chamber of his revolver, spins it, clicks it shut and aims to shoot an unseen foe in the distance. He drinks another shot.]

VAN HELSING

[To audience.]

It was just another lousy day – creeps crowding my office with their hard-luck stories. And after eight hours of petty theft and pickpockets, I was ready to pound the pavement toward a greasy spoon or a corner bar to unwind. But here I was. Waiting. For what? It didn't take me long to find out.

[There is a knock at the door.]

VAN HELSING

We're closed. Come back tomorrow.

[Another knock.]

VAN HELSING

Go away!

[Another knock.]

VAN HELSING

Persistent, ain't ya?

[He gets up and moves to the door. LUCY is standing there, in a hat and coat, as if she doesn't want to be recognized. Light shift. He speaks directly to the audience. During this moment, LUCY is bathed in romantic light.]

VAN HELSING

One look at this dame, and I knew she was trouble.

LUCY

Thank you for seeing me.

VAN HELSING

Is that what I'm doing? Miss...

LUCY

Murray. Lucy Murray.

VAN HELSING

The actress? Yeah, I thought you looked familiar. You're good.

LUCY

Thank you.

VAN HELSING

(To audience.)

And she was, too. I'd seen her in at least a dozen flicks where all she had to do was bat her big baby blues and any number of goons would toss their lives away for her. The way she was looking at me now was no different.

LUCY

Detective, I need your help.

VAN HELSING

It's after hours.

LUCY

I realize that.

VAN HELSING

Well, then it's gonna cost you.

LUCY

[Puts a large wad of cash on his desk.]

Money is no object. I have to talk to you tonight. It's very important.

[Sits.]

You're the only one who can help me.

VAN HELSING

Okay, Miss Murray. Let's get one thing straight. If you're looking for protection, I'm not a babysitter.

LUCY

That's not why I'm here.

VAN HELSING

Right. What's his name, and how long's he been cheating on you?

LUCY

Excuse me?

VAN HELSING

You want me to tail some creep who's been two-timing you, right?

LUCY

Oh, no, it's nothing like that. There's been a murder...

VAN HELSING

Murder?

[To audience.]

Now we were getting to the real story.

[To LUCY, pushes the money back to her across the desk.]

Whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm sorry, little lady, you're barking up the wrong tree. I don't take murder cases no more. Strictly adulterers, kidnapers, and card sharks. I'm just an average Joe who goes home each night to his stale pastrami sandwich and dime store novel and hopes to wake up in his own bed. Alive.

LUCY

Sorry. I didn't mean to waste your time.

VAN HELSING

Hey, toots, ten minutes with a doll like you ain't ever a waste of time.

LUCY

You're Abe Van Helsing, right?

VAN HELSING

That's the rumor.

LUCY

You're the detective who caught that serial killer in London ten years ago?

VAN HELSING

[To audience.]

Now it really was time to say good-bye. It was getting late, and she was getting personal.

[To Lucy.]

That sap retired and hung up his badge.

LUCY

But you were in all the papers.

VAN HELSING

Well, fame is fleeting.

[Grabs a liquor bottle off the shelf.]

Look, I don't wanna talk about it. I'm trying to find a polite way to kick you out because I'm a gentleman. Now, beat it.

[Drinks a shot.]

LUCY

[Rises, then goes to the door. Speaks with her back to him.]

Her body had been drained. Of blood.

VAN HELSING

What?

LUCY

[Turns to him.]

Can I stay?

VAN HELSING

I'm not taking the case.

LUCY

Then why should we discuss it?

[Sits on edge of desk, showing a bit too much leg.]

I don't want to waste your time.

VAN HELSING

All right, Miss Murray, you've got my attention, so let's stop playing games.

LUCY

[Steely.]

I don't play games when my life's at stake.

[Pulls out a cigarette.]

VAN HELSING

[Lights her cigarette.]

Start at the beginning.

[Offers her the glass.]

You want a drink to calm your nerves?

LUCY

No, thank you.

VAN HELSING

[Drinks it, then sits down.]

Then you won't mind if I calm mine.

LUCY

I'm shooting a film on location at Whitby Hills Sanitarium. About 20 miles east of L.A. It was built in the twenties as a hospital for the rich and famous, then shut down in the thirties, but last year reopened as a... a...

VAN HELSING

[To audience.]

Loony bin. Nuthouse. Funny farm. Booby hatch.

LUCY

We're shooting a movie – a monster movie – Jekyll and Hyde story. A young woman is stalked by a man who keeps transforming into a killer every time there's a full moon.

VAN HELSING

Charming. And I take it you're the damsel in distress?

LUCY

In more ways than one, I'm afraid. The lead actress was Lorna Mills...

VAN HELSING

[To audience.]

The owner of the best set of gams on the silver screen or off.

LUCY

Well, she disappeared a week ago, and the studio brought me in to replace her. Anyway, a few days ago her body...

[At a loss for words.]

turned up...

VAN HELSING

Turned up?

LUCY

She'd been murdered, drained of her blood. So, you've got to help me. I haven't been able to sleep since it happened, and when I do, I have dreadful nightmares. I dream I'm being watched by...these horrible red eyes. And Dr. Seward is concerned because I've started walking in my sleep.

VAN HELSING

This Dr. Seward has called the cops, I presume?

LUCY

No! That's why I'm here. No one has said a word. They're afraid of what the negative publicity would mean for the sanitarium and the movie. Even Jonathan is keeping quiet.

VAN HELSING

Jonathan?

LUCY

Harker. The film's writer and director. He and I used to be...

VAN HELSING

[To audience.]

I could tell by the look in her eyes that this was not strictly a professional relationship.

[To LUCY.]

Where'd they stash the stiff?

LUCY

I'm not sure. I did overhear Nurse Westfall say something about a morgue underneath the sanitarium. But I don't think it's been used in years.

VAN HELSING

Like I said before, this sounds like a case for the police.

LUCY

I don't want the police.

[Tries to give him the money again.]

I want you.

VAN HELSING

[To audience.]

Even though it was the best offer I'd had all week, there were too many strings attached for my liking.

[To LUCY.]

I left what happened in London behind me ten years ago, and I'm not interested in taking a trip down memory lane.

LUCY

I just thought...

VAN HELSING

What? That you know the whole story? No one knows the whole story...

[Turns to audience.]

Not even me. What I do know is that the final victim of that serial killer was my own wife, my Emily. I was forced to kneel over her bloodless corpse lying in an alleyway, covered in filth, her eyes open in terror staring at me, accusing me. If only I'd gotten there sooner. If only I'd been smarter. If only I'd protected her the way she deserved. All I'd managed to do was to nab some poor schmo who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was tried and fried - case closed. And I left London a hero. But two weeks later, when I arrived in California, to an empty house full of my wife's shattered memories, there was an envelope waiting for me on the kitchen table. I opened it, and inside was a note that read simply, "The dead travel fast." I was just about to toss it into the garbage, when something else fell out of the package: my wife's silver locket that I had given her on our honeymoon. Emily never took that from around her neck. Never. It was more sacred to her than her wedding ring. And it had been missing when I found her body in the alley. A fact I never told Scotland Yard. I knew in an instant that I had condemned an innocent man

to his death, and the real killer was still at large. The next day I turned in my badge, and hung out my shingle. And I never looked back. And I sure as hell wasn't about to spill my guts to some Hollywood skirt who had been spooked by the boogeyman in a high-class nuthouse.

[To LUCY.]

It's past my bedtime, Miss Murray.

LUCY

So that's it? You're not going to help me?

VAN HELSING

Sorry. Like I told you, I'm out of the murder biz.

LUCY

[Stands.]

So, you're just going to let more innocent people die? To let me die?

VAN HELSING

They're not my problem. And you're not my problem.

LUCY

But I need you!

VAN HELSING

I'm not a hero, okay? And I don't wanna be.

LUCY

Don't make up your mind yet, please.

[Gathers her belongings.]

Just come to the sanitarium tomorrow night. There's going to be a cocktail party. Jonathan and Dr. Seward are trying to impress some wealthy European who just moved in next door.

[Hands him an envelope.]

Here's an invitation. You can come as my guest.

VAN HELSING

I have plans.

[Holds up the bottle of scotch. Pours a drink.]

LUCY

Cancel them. The directions are on the back.

VAN HELSING

But...

LUCY

You have to see for yourself. I can't explain it, but there is something evil going on. Good-bye.

[Exits.]

VAN HELSING

After she left the room, I felt a familiar lump lodge in the pit of my stomach. Was it because her eyes had reminded me too much of Emily's? As I folded up the invitation and shoved it into my pocket, my fingers touched the ice-cold metal of a silver bullet that had been crafted from my wife's locket, the one talisman which protected me day and night. As I held it tenderly in the palm of my hand, now clammy with sweat, I knew that I had no choice.

[Tosses the bullet up in the air, catches it, then closes his hand.]

I was on the case.

[The lights fade.]



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