

SILENT, BUT DEADLY

BY DON ZOLIDIS

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CHARACTERS

Principals

DESDEMONA O'TOOLE,

a silent film star. Kind of a handful. (she/her)

KERMIT VON HOVEL

a strange man, playing the role of Das Vampyr.

Might actually be a vampire. (he/him)

F.G. MACINTOSH

the director of the film, trying to salvage his dying career.

(he/him, but could be any)

SADIE NORTH

a washed-up actress at the age of twenty-six,

playing the role of the nun. (she/her)

WALKER BRONCO

a silent film star, playing the role of the romantic hero. (he/him)

JENS SVARLBARD

a producer on the film. Swedish.

(he/him, but could be any)

GRACIE LANSDOWNE

Jens' assistant, very sunny.

(she/her, but could be any)

SUSAN WORLEY

a makeup artist. (she/her)

COOKIE

the caterer. (she/her)

VIRGINIA MOUNTBATTEN

a dresser. A hopeful actress. (she/her)

VALENTINA CARAVELLI

the detective. Italian. (she/her)

Other Roles

GUS

holds the clacker. (any gender)

GIRLS

later vampire spawn. Playing six other residents of Mother Framingham's Finishing School for Delinquent Young Ladies:

GIRL 1

the ringleader.

GIRL 2

an innocent.

GIRL 3

the bruiser.

GIRL 4

the flapper.

GIRL 5

a mess, the crazy one.

GIRL 6

a debutante.

CASTING NOTE

Feel free to add stagehands, set people, and crew for a larger cast, including:

THE RAKE

a silent role in the summary, can be played by one of the GIRLS.

MOTHER and FATHER

silent roles in the summary, can be played by one of the GIRLS.

SETTING

The reshoot for the silent film, *Das Vampyr, Scourge of the Night*. They have been at this for weeks and fuses and money are running short.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

It might be very fun to actually create *Das Vampyr, Scourge of the Night* as a silent film. It might be cool to show the film in the lobby during intermission, or to have clips of it playing at other times. There are some additional roles in the film than in the play, so feel free to cast different people when necessary. Of course, it's not necessary to actually make the movie, but if you're looking for something to do...

MUSIC

It might also be fun to have piano music during the filming of the various scenes. Feel free to underscore the play wherever it feels appropriate. I have suggested a number of spots where it might be a good idea to have the piano, but feel free to add and augment throughout.

MAKEUP

Kermit Von Hovel is in the Vampyr makeup throughout the play. The makeup should be ghoulish and extreme, with huge dark circles under his eyes—he's basically unrecognizable out of makeup. Please check out the film *Nosferatu* for an example of what I'm going for here. In Act Two, all of the chorus girls are in similar makeup, having been transformed into vampiric minions.

SILENT, BUT DEADLY

ACT ONE

In the darkness, a piano flourish.

Creepy, ominous music. We are in the world of the macabre. Lights rise on a movie set. The crypt-like basement beneath a reform school for girls. Old furniture covered in dustcloths and even more dust.

Desdemona O'Toole, wearing a long nightgown (but her hair and makeup are perfect), holds a candle in front of her and cautiously steps into the room.

She looks one way, afraid.

Then she looks another way, even more afraid.

F.G. (Offstage, loud.) NO.

Cut.

Audible grumbling from everyone as everything stops. F.G. Macintosh swoops in.

I need apprehension. I need fear.

DESDEMONA. That's what I was doing. That's what I have been doing all day! Look! Look at my face! This is fear!

She gives an exaggerated frightened look.

F.G. That's mild concern!

DESDEMONA. This is terror! I am terrified!

F.G. You look about—where am I? A crypt? Why is there a crypt beneath this finishing school for wayward girls? But I must investigate due to my curious feminine nature and then...

He demonstrates, gasping—

TERROR!

DESDEMONA. That's what I was doing. If you had any sense or artistic vision you would know that you vermin.

F.G. It must be perfect. I want a gasp. I want an enormous gasp. Let's take it back. Places!

Desdemona retreats to her initial spot.

GUS. *(Has been doing this for thirteen hours.) Das Vampyr, Scourge of the Night, Scene Six.*

Take forty-seven.

He clacks the clacker

F.G. And...action!

The same piano music.

Desdemona does her entrance again.

She looks one way, gasps.

Looks the other way, gasps again.

NO.

Groans from everyone.

Take it back.

GUS. *Das Vampyr, Scourge of the Night, Scene Six.*
(Sigh.) Take forty-eight.

F.G. And...action!

Desdemona does it again—with the music.

She looks one way, gasps.

Looks the other way, GASPS AS HUGELY AS SHE POSSIBLY CAN, lifting both hands to her face, pulling at her hair, everything.

F.G. directs her from off camera, but he's not stopping her this time.

Turn to the left!

She does, dramatically.

What is that sound?

She puts a hand to her ear, dramatically.

It's behind you!

She turns around again, even more dramatically.

And cue Das Vampyr!

Kermit Von Hovel, dressed ghoulishly as Das Vampyr, with extreme makeup, lurches into the room like hell itself has spit him forth. He was born for this. He is, perhaps, an actual vampire.

Desdemona screams silently.

F.G. NO. Cut.

Desdemona screams audibly in frustration.

Look at him. Look at this creature. Kermit, by the way, that was fantastic.

KERMIT. Was good?

F.G. You're a natural, it's like you're not even acting. Absolutely terrifying. Which is why—YOU NEED TO BE TERRIFIED!

DESDEMONA. I am terrified of him!

KERMIT. After this is done, we get drink.

DESDEMONA. No.

KERMIT. *(Staring at her.)* You will obey me. Your will is weak.

DESDEMONA. See?! This is what he does!

F.G. He's in character. I love it.

KERMIT. Yes. Character.

Stares at Desdemona again, trying to hypnotize her.

Dine with me this evening.

DESDEMONA. I am the star of this show. I dine with other stars. Not you.

F.G. Desdemona—the audience must feel your revulsion and fear. We must experience it with you.

KERMIT. My name on title. Not yours. I am star.

DESDEMONA. You are nothing! No one else in this film has a name worth mentioning! I am Desdemona O'Toole!

KERMIT. I am Kermit Von Hovel. Fourth of my name. Destined to walk the Earth after my unnatural demise.

F.G. Let's take it back to Kermit's entrance.

DESDEMONA. I am going back to my dressing room.

F.G. We have accomplished nothing today! We haven't completed a single scene!

GUS. (*Underneath.*) I'm shocked. Shocked that this is happening. What a surprise. Et cetera.

DESDEMONA. That's your fault! You're an awful director! You're barely giving me direction!

F.G. What?! That's all I've been doing!

F.G. leaps up and tries to act out the scene—

You look to the left, you look to the right, you GASP—AAAAAH-HH!! Like that! Do it like that!

DESDEMONA. I am not a trained seal. I am an actress! I am the star of twenty-one films! The critic Byron Chesterton called me America's treasure!

F.G. He called you America's sunken treasure.

DESDEMONA. I starred in *Rise from a Coma*! I do not deserve to be treated like this!

F.G. groans and puts his head in his hands.

F.G. Please. I am begging you. *Act.* You can have anything you want. My life savings. My first-born child. My second-born child. My third husband.* Anything. Just please do the scene.

DESDEMONA. I'm holding you to that.

F.G. Which?

DESDEMONA. Haven't decided yet. I may need to review the humans and see which one suits me best. Very well. I shall attempt the scene one more time.

KERMIT. I take child too, yes?

F.G. No.

Desdemona gets back in her place.

GUS. *Das Vampyr, Scourge of the Night*, Scene Six. Scene Six Forever. Take—forty-nine.

F.G. And...Action!

* Or wife.

Lights black out on them.

Up on Sadie North and Walker Bronco, elsewhere. Sadie is in costume, a full nun's habit. Walker is in his dressing robe.

If possible, Sadie is smoking a cigarette.

If not, no worries.

SADIE. She has to die.

Short pause.

WALKER. I think she almost got it in that eighty-third take.

SADIE. She has to *die*, Walker. We have been here for four months—in reshoots! For a role *with no lines*! In this godforsaken hellscape.

WALKER. Connecticut?

SADIE. Whatever it's called. It's ghastly. It snowed the other day. *Snowed*. I should be in Hollywood starring in a movie, instead I'm stuck in Nightmareland playing this...nun.

WALKER. The habit suits you. You look foxy.

SADIE. You can barely see my face! You could put anyone in this costume!

WALKER. But the way you wear that wimple...mmm.

Walker tries to move in on her, she swats him away.

SADIE. Don't try to charm your way out of this.

WALKER. Out of what?

SADIE. Out of the plan.

WALKER. We got a plan?

SADIE. It's a good thing you're so pretty.

WALKER. Baby.

SADIE. This movie will kill my career. I'll be stuck playing a nun for the rest of my life. Or worse: A mother. Don't you want her dead? Think about what she did to you. The way she toyed with your heart.

WALKER. That was something the studio put together. Hollywood loves a love story. They thought it might generate some good press.

SADIE. And it did—for her. She catapulted to stardom while you were left in the lurch playing—

WALKER. I'm the hero.

SADIE. You're barely in this picture! It should be your name on the poster! Although I still think you need to change it.

WALKER. What's wrong with Walker Bronco?

SADIE. It's a little over the top.

WALKER. I don't think it's over the top enough. Maybe I should change it to something more manly.

SADIE. Honey—

WALKER. What if I was Bronco Dynamite? Does this look like the face of a Bronco Dynamite?

(Announcer voice.) "And starring Bronco Dynamite as Moses."
Oh that's good.

SADIE. Moses?

WALKER. Oh yeah. Dream role. "Let my people go you filthy Pharaoh. Or I'll teach you a thing or two about being a man."

He mimes punching an imaginary Pharaoh and adds sound effects.

Pow. Whap. Smash.

SADIE. Except no one will hear your voice.

WALKER. The talkies are coming, Sadie. Sooner or later.

SADIE. Over my dead body.

WALKER. And Walker Bronco is going to be ready. I been taking voice lessons. Listen to these lines:

(As an exceptionally manly man.) "That's just the way it is, sweetcakes. I have to go. The road calls me."

SADIE. Every woman who hears that will be devastated.

WALKER. Thanks.

SADIE. Which is why I'm so glad that you're so true to me.

WALKER. You know I am, baby. All that is in the past.

SADIE. Mm-hm. So you'll do it?

WALKER. Do it?

SADIE. Make it look like an accident.

It takes him a moment.

WALKER. You're not serious.

Murder?

SADIE. Think of it like you're playing a new part. Here's what you're going to do...

She whispers in his ear—

Lights up elsewhere on Jens and Gracie. Gracie has a clipboard and she's taking notes.

JENS. The woman has to die.

GRACIE. Noted. Woman. Must. Die.

JENS. Don't write that down.

GRACIE. Sorry Mr. Svarlbard, I thought I was supposed to write down all of your brilliant ideas.

JENS. This brilliant idea, do not write down.

GRACIE. Okay. Um...

She looks at the note she's written down, flustered.

So what do I do with...?

JENS. Let me see.

He tears out the page of the notebook and crumples it up.

Fixed.

GRACIE. Thank you. Okay—woman must die.

JENS. Don't write it down.

GRACIE. Yes. It's in here, sir. Locked away.

She points to her brain.

Ends the movie on a dark note, though, unless the vampires are the heroes? They've converted all of the young ladies at the finishing school? And then our heroine is bitten three times in the neck and joins them? I love it, actually! It's so unexpected! What a great message too! Don't flirt with boys or you will be killed and forced to exist in undeath forever. I think a lot of young ladies need to hear that.

JENS. I am not talking about the movie, Gracie.

GRACIE. Oh. Ohhhh.

(Almost gets it.) Ohhhh?

(Gets it.) Ohhhhh. Sir?

JENS. Every take costs me money. Seventy-one takes on Scene Five. Fifty-nine takes on Scene Four. One hundred and twelve takes on walking down the stairs. How many days can we spend trying to get that woman to walk down the stairs properly?! Due to her contract I can't fire her, she's a star. The only solution is a tragic death. What did I say about writing notes?

Gracie stops writing notes.

GRACIE. Sorry. Habit. Perhaps we could generate some ideas of how to kill her? A brainstorm, if you will. I could write those down—

JENS. Do not—

GRACIE. And then I would eat the notes afterwards! I just—I'm an experiential learner, if I don't write things down, I don't remember them.

JENS. Write in code.

GRACIE. What sort of code?

JENS. I don't know, come up with a code!

GRACIE. Of course! Let's develop ideas for the code. Another storm of brains.

JENS. No we cannot storm brains for the code!

GRACIE. Ooh! I could switch each letter with another letter. That's neat!

She starts writing down her code.

JENS. You are making this very difficult.

GRACIE. Sorry, Mr. Svarlbard. Can I just reiterate again that I love my job and thank you so much for this opportunity, I love Hollywood so much even if it's a den of snakes like everyone at home said.

JENS. It is not a den of snakes, Gracie.

GRACIE. Right, it's completely wholesome. Let's work on ideas for murder. 1. Poison. 2. Scorpions.

JENS. We are in Connecticut, where are we going to get scorpions?

GRACIE. 3. Black bears. At this stage of the creative process, you don't throw out any ideas. First thing that pops into your mind.

JENS. Strangulation.

GRACIE. Love it.

Clowns.

JENS. How is one murdered by clowns?

GRACIE. Don't judge the ideas. I love this. 6. Heavy object dropped from above. 7. Knife. 8. Crossbow bolt fired from a trap. 9. Fire. 10. Tarantulas descending from above on a small undetectable wire. 11. Black bears descending from above on a small undetectable wire.

JENS. You seem to have a lot of ideas, Gracie.

GRACIE. I'm a personal assistant, sir. I think about murder all the time.

She meets Jens' gaze.

All the time.

JENS. Right. Remind me to give you a raise.

GRACIE. Can I write that down?

JENS. Please do.

Lights change to Cookie, Susan, and Virginia backstage.

Susan is pacing angrily as Cookie sets up a catering table.

Cookie frequently tastes the food.

SUSAN. I'm gonna kill her.

VIRGINIA. Oh sweetie no—

COOKIE. YES. That is the BEST idea I've heard all day! I am IN!

VIRGINIA. Cookie!

COOKIE. Some people need to die, Virginia. She's extremely rude.

VIRGINIA. That's not a reason to kill someone!

COOKIE. She eats in costume. Continuously.

SUSAN. And in makeup. I have to redo it all the time because she's smeared an éclair all over her face.

VIRGINIA. To be fair, the éclairs are irresistible.

COOKIE. I have told her over and over again not to eat in costume, and what does she do?!

VIRGINIA. She eats in costume?

COOKIE. She eats in costume! She has to die.

SUSAN. Today she called me Sarah. We've been on this shoot for months. I do her makeup every morning. Every morning she complains about it and calls me by a different name.

VIRGINIA. She can be difficult.

SUSAN. Difficult?! Difficult?! She's a monster!

COOKIE. The word demon is actually in her name. That's what I call her now. Des-DEMON-a. Behind her back. When she's not looking. Sometimes when she is looking.

VIRGINIA. I bet she's really nice if you get to know her.

SUSAN. You know her?

VIRGINIA. No, but she's my second cousin—

COOKIE. Ohhh.

VIRGINIA. And she promised to put in a word with the director for me—I think she's going to get me a part in the film. Look out world: Virginia Mountbatten, actress!

SUSAN. You would be amazing. You have incredible bone structure.

VIRGINIA. Thank you!

SUSAN. I could do brilliant things with your makeup.

COOKIE. I still say we kill her. After she puts in a word.

VIRGINIA. She's family.

COOKIE. You've never wanted to kill someone in your family? Sheesh. Most of my family is on my hit list.

SUSAN. You have a hit list?

COOKIE. You don't?

VIRGINIA. We're not actually talking about this, are we?

SUSAN. Oh no we're joking.

COOKIE. ...Yes. Joking.

SUSAN. We're joking, Cookie.

COOKIE. I said yes!

SUSAN. Yes but you said it a bit strangely.

COOKIE. I was feeling it out.

SUSAN. We're joking. No one here actually wants to murder Des-demona O'Toole.