



Preview Script

*“Vanessa & The Vanguard”*

# **Vanessa & The Vanguard**

By Anton Robert Krueger

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# **vanessa & the vanguard**

**“in art only, the bizarre is beautiful”**  
*(Charles Baudelaire)*

## setting

The action occurs in an elegant tea garden situated somewhere in the 1930's. Centre stage is occupied by a garden table flanked by two matching chairs. Slightly behind the table stands a colourful parasol. Stage front to the right and left are identical plinths which support ancient telephones. Two plants appear at the back of the stage, slightly closer to centre stage than the plinths, in order to fashion a pleasingly symmetrical trapezoid in which the action occurs.

## 3 camp characters

- Orton T. Norton* An oddly beclad detective, Mr T. Norton comes across as highly erratic. He undergoes frenetic changes of mood and moves effortlessly from extreme anger to subservience and back again.
- Vanessa* Quintessentially lovely, weepy and melodramatic. Beauty spot - optional.
- Waiter* The waiter appears in gloves, bow-tie and tails. He remains poker-faced throughout.

# vanessa & the vanguard

## scene one

*(An uplifting Bach concerto plays for approximately 33.25 seconds, before the lights reveal Orton and Vanessa beneath the parasol.)*

**Orton** Look- action's where it's at, right? You stop acting, it's over...so come on, let's go, right now-

*(He stands up to go. She doesn't move.)*

**Vanessa** No thank you Orton. I'm not going to bed with you.

**Orton** Look- let's not make too big a deal out of it, please. Let's just go. Without another word.

*(Orton exits.)*

**Vanessa** It was very kind of you to ask...but I can't help thinking it'll turn out... *(aside)* less than pleasant.

*(Orton enters.)*

**Orton** Listen, Vanessa- don't you see...I mean, can't you tell-

**Vanessa** No.

**Orton** Look- suppose, hypothetically, I proposed that...it only happen once? hmm? ...uno...

**Vanessa** I don't approve of the habit of doing things in sets of one, now for goodness

sakes, stop it!

*(Orton sits down again. They simultaneously sip at their respective teas.)*

**Orton** Well Vaness', then I'm plainly bamboozled, is what I am...I thought it was what you wanted, you know.

**Vanessa** What on earth do you mean?

**Orton** I mean why on earth did you call me up then, is what on earth I mean... I mean, I haven't seen you (on earth) for five years, I mean, and then it's you who wants to meet me, I mean...and...but...then...then you don't want to manipulate the mango.

**Vanessa** You don't think there might be other reasons for old friends to visit with one another?

**Orton** Other reasons? I'm a reasonable man, Vanessa. In the extreme.

**Vanessa** I wanted to talk to you-

**Orton** Of course! Of course we can talk...but...and...yet...no oingo boingo? no rooty tutty?

**Vanessa** Orton please!

**Orton** What do you presuppose Freud was on about then? huh? hmm? Now there was a reasonable man...I mean, this chap spends his whole life proving what is by now a well established phenomenon- namely this business of the libido running rife in amidst the species and all...and...but...then...then you step along and utterly discredit the man..."oh no thank you, Ziggie" you proclaim..."oh, I don't think I'm very interested in doing the dirty, not me, no sir - no scratching snippet, thank thee very much, no Hot Bot and Lollipop ...no Jing-Jang...you know...no nooky...no schnitzel & sauce...no zosh...no rusty rifle & canasta for me sir oh no sir, no-

**Vanessa** I'll thank you to contain yourself!

**Orton** No sweat, no sirree, it's fine with me. If you just want to talk, we can just...jabber...hey?...okay?

**Vanessa** Here I've been thinking how marvellous it is to see you again, and all you want to do is hopscotch into bed with me.

**Orton** Hey he' hey- I'm a great listener, Vanes- supreme, you've got to believe me- *(pause...then in sotto voice)*...I mean, if you don't want to wrestle with ringo-

**Vanessa** No!

**Orton** Only-

**Vanessa** No.

**Orton** But-

**Vanessa** No.

*(pause)*

**Orton** What if...

*(longer pause...He clears his throat.)*

**Orton** How's about-

**Vanessa** No!

*(Started into simultaneity, they sip at their teas.)*

**Orton** Well, all you really needed to say, was-

**Vanessa** (sobs) No.

(Vanessa starts crying.)

**Orton** Hey...it's okay...Vanessa- it's alright...If you don't want to...it's really quite alright, we needn't, you know...I'm the last person to insist when it comes to this sort of thing.

**Vanessa** Oh Orton...it's not you...it's just that I've been involved in...in an abusive relationship.

**Orton** Wha-! My God Vanessa!

**Vanessa** That's why I couldn't possibly have a casual, if enjoyable, liaison with you this afternoon.

**Orton** So...it's his fault! I'll break the bastard!

**Vanessa** He was never violent to my person...it was more, on an emotional level...

**Orton** (*violently*) Anybody daring to touch a single precious hair of your emotional level deserves to be...deserves-

**Vanessa** I didn't want to tell you at first, since I feared you might come over all... bravado.

**Orton** (*blustering*) deserves...No fear of that, my sweet, now you give me this one's details and I'll...I'll...My God, I'll...he deserves-

**Vanessa** It wasn't the kind of abuse you're thinking of. It was more subtle, he'd threaten-

**Orton** (*apoplectic*) Threaten? Threaten you? My dear, any reprobate rogue threatening you deserves more than a locking up I'll tell you what, he deserves-

**Vanessa** He'd threaten to leave me, when he was the one feeling insecure.

(pause)

**Orton** Wha-?...He'd threaten to...leave you?

**Vanessa** Yes.

**Orton** ...when he was the one...feeling...insecure...?

**Vanessa** Yes.

**Orton** oh...hmm?...uh...

**Vanessa** Have you ever been in a situation like that? Where someone you love hurts you, and you hate them for it but you can't stand losing them because you feel like you'll die if you do?

**Orton** Well, I...I can't rightly say...what I mean is...gee whillikers, that's not exactly a crime now is it...uh, what I mean is...why don't you, simply...leave him?

**Vanessa** I did leave him.

**Orton** Excellent! Now let's have this boulder's details, and maybe I could...you know, maybe I could break a few, you know, before-

(Orton has sprung up and is gesticulating with crazed, kung fu like gestures.)

**Vanessa** Good God, Orton!

**Orton** As a favour. For you, my heart, I would break anything- you just say the word and I'll nail the blessed blackguard, I'll-

**Vanessa** No, Orton...the word is no! Confound it!

**Orton** Not?

**Vanessa** No!

*(pause)*

**Orton** *(meek)* But goshdern, Vanern, why not?...He evidently clearly deserves-

**Vanessa** Because...I love him.

**Orton** Wha-? You love this miscreant? Am I hearing you right?

**Vanessa** If only you'd let me finish!

**Orton** Oh all right.

**Vanessa** I left him not because of anything he'd done, but because of my own silly misgivings, my own incessant doubts...I felt...I needed space to clear my head, that was all...to clarify my emotions. But when I went back- Griffen was gone...moved out of our house, our home...Yesterday, I found the house deserted, the garden dead...nothing left at all...I don't know where he is...

*(Orton has been busying himself making notes of all this.)*

**Orton** He's made a break for it dammit- smarter than we think.

**Vanessa** I want you to help me find him.

**Orton** Abuse? Threats? Letting a perfectly good garden go to waste? Oh, we'll find this malefactor, yes ma'am, you came to the right man alright. How long has he been on the run?

**Vanessa** I haven't seen him for two months. I'm so worried-

**Orton** Yes, I worry too, but it does no good to worry 'nes, soon as he shows his mullocky head again- we'll nail him, so help me. The knave won't know what hit him.

**Vanessa** Stop talking about Griffen that way! He's not a bad person.

**Orton** Not bad? Wha-?

**Vanessa** He may be somewhat troubled, but I wouldn't want anything happening to him. I must find him. Hearing you'd become a detective, I thought...perhaps you would help me...

**Orton** I see...

**Vanessa** You are still...practising...as a detective, I mean...aren't you?

**Orton** Yes yes yes...though I'm way beyond practising, my girl.

**Vanessa** So will you help me?

*(pause)*

**Orton** Vanessa...I feel cruelly misused, afraid to say. All this time I thought it was me you wanted to see...whereas all this time you've been viewing me only as an instrument of your purposes.

**Vanessa** It's not true, Orton, I did want to see you again...and I will pay you.

**Orton** Pay? I don't get it. I mean, (a)- this fiend drinks, surely (b)- he beats you to a pulp, (c)-...my God, I'll, he deserves-

**Vanessa** He doesn't drink! He never beat me! Orton-

**Orton** I'll-

**Vanessa** Not once!

**Orton** He deserves-

**Vanessa** If you don't want to help me, then that's up to you...I thought you were someone I could trust, someone I could rely on, someone I could count on. But no-

*(She has gotten up to go. He recalls her.)*

- Orton** Relax, Bolero, heh heh...hey, just relax, okay?...settle down Milwaukee...I can help you...in fact, I'm going to help you...but I'm not going to get it.
- Vanessa** I can pay you three thousand five hundred and twenty-seven rand. That's all I've got.
- Orton** For you 'nessa, you know, for you...I'd take three thousand five hundred and twenty-seven rand...even if I'm not going to get it, is all.
- Vanessa** Thank you Orton...it would really mean so awfully much to me.
- Orton** Though you really should have come around to my office if this was all you wanted from me, I mean, if it was all to be strictly above board, you know. You really had me hoping there, you little teaser...but oh well, sera serai, as they say.

*(He grants her an endearing sidelong glance. They sip tea again. The cup is midway to his mouth when Orton decides to look at his watch, spilling tea all over his pants. He leaps up.)*

- Orton** Jumping Jehoshophats...is that the time?...Look- it's been a really splendid afternoon, even if we didn't get to- you know...even if we didn't get to...but you pop around to my office in the morn, and bring along anything which might constitute a lead of sorts, you know- phone numbers, photographs, address books, diaries, anything at all-
- Vanessa** Okay, I will, I'll-
- Orton** Yes, Nessie, you bring along any of his old shoes, shaving lotions, parking tickets...lint, hair follicles, underwear, unpaid bills, anything you can scrape together-
- Vanessa** Alright Orton, I'll go through the-
- Orton** ...fingerprints, urine samples...any little thing
- Vanessa** Enough already Orton!
- Orton** And if you have opportunity, it may prove wise to contact these people...(he hands her a business card)...It's an excellent shelter for abused women...a real bastion for the battered...it's, uh...it's run by my...by my ex, you know...Give them a call.

*(An exasperated Vanessa leaves. Orton takes some time to longingly lounge in her freshly vacated seat. A waiter arrives to clear the table and eye contact is made between the two of them before the lights dim. The cross-fade into the next scene occurs with the help of the first part of PDQ Bach's "Musical Sacrifice - 50% off" from the album "Two Pianos are better than One".)*

## scene two

*(Lighting on a patch stage left containing Orton and a telephone on a plinth. Orton is discovered practising draws and swirls with his revolver. When the telephone rings -whereupon the music cuts- he takes a few tentative draws at the telephone before answering.)*

- Orton** Orton T. Norton...Hello mother...was it you who phoned earlier?...No, the phone didn't ring...there was never a sound...that's why I thought if you had tried to phone earlier then- you know- there might have been something the matter with the phone, you know...because I heard, in a word- nothing...not a sausage...but if it wasn't you who phoned...maybe someone else didn't phone, you know...but that's neither here nor there, how are we?...oh I'm swell- fine as a fit fiddler...hmm?...ooh yes...as a bee mams, as a bee...and I took a new case aboard...remember Vanessa Poke? Haven't seen her for donkeys when out she

pops from out the blue and wants me to find her boyfriend, the dirty sod...hmm?...oh no, she's lovely, it's her boyfriend who's the beast- threatens her, you know...when...when he's the one feeling insecure...a real Nordvik Quisling if you ask me...uh-huh...yes...oh it hardly took a jiffy, you know me...I tracked him down that selfsame afternoon...it turns out he's dead, you know...poor dirty sod...yes, appears Mr. Krell took Chapman's Peak and beached at Muizenburg ...uh-huh?...yes...oh no, I heard about it on the wireless, you know, didn't lift a finger, would you believe...yes...uh-huh?...no...no, I'm not sure yet how she'll take it, I haven't had the heart to tell her, to be honest...oh, it's been weeks already ...simply weeks and weeks, it's just that, she may well be disappointed, you know how it is with these things...she might be terribly upset...and...and she may well want her money back, you know...three thousand five hundred and twenty six rand...yes...she still owes me a rand, in fact...uh-huh?... ...hmm...yes, perhaps ...uh-huh...you think? ...bu-...well...listen mammy, maybe you're right...in fact, you're always right...yes...now don't make me feel all guilty about everything mams, we've been through that with that Siegfried chap and all...I don't know...it's been great gabbing, but I'm going to go now... because...because...yes I'll think about it...yes of course...right you are....bye mammy...I said goodbye ...bye ...bye...yes ma'am...yes...bye-bye...

*(He has gently been easing down the receiver during the ending of the phone call and now Orton wipes his brow.)*

### scene three

*(This time the music accompanying the cross-fade turns out to be a sinister extract from the opening of Act II of Kurt Weill's "Aufstieg und fall der Stadt Mahoganny". The lighting has switched to the telephoned plinth on the other side. Telephone rings when the music cuts, as before.)*

**Vanessa** Vanessa, hello?...finethanksandyouOrton...you have something? At long last!...No...he wasn't a musician, he was a metallurgist...no,...I don't think so...no, he doesn't play the double bass...no, a metallurgist, Orton...no he never played any instruments! No! Not even the guitar, Orton, nothing! No I do not want to play your piccolo Orton, that's disgusting! I thought we'd established that-...uh-huh, someone else?...what? -a wooden leg?...no, he doesn't have a wooden leg...Orton!... ...Of course I'm sure! How would he have hidden it from me!... ..uh-huh?...uh-huh?...uh-huh? Oh well, I suppose he might have done that, but it's unlikely...No - certainly not both legs...that's quite impossible...No, I don't care to see a photograph of some limbless amphibian- it's not him!

*(The phone's down, the music up- another extract from the "Musical Sacrifice", Orton's theme tune.)*

### scene four

*(Orton's at the dial.)*

**Orton** Hello Mammy, it's your Orton here...how are you?...that's too bad...no Mams, I haven't told her yet...no...of course...hey- do I tell you how to be mother? So let me be detective, okay, alright?...Because you see I'm rather troubled myself. In fact, I'm so upset, I'm miserable...you see...I seem to have become utterly

besotted by this girl, 'fraid to say...Yes...I mean, I'm sure we'd make the finest of fine pairs once things got rolling, you know...We'd be...why we'd be Heloise and Abelard...Benedict and Beatrice...Patsy Kline and...uh...Emmanuelle, or whoever, you know...But how does one get the spiel in motion? What does one do?...really? you think?...Roses? Oh...I kind of figured I'd sort of trick her into it, you know, surely nothing wrong with the odd spot of deceit, surely, you know...I mean isn't love a kind of illusion, any-ways? like there's nothing reasonable about it, so I've heard...uh-huh?... really?... you think?... poetry?! but ma that's strictly for saps...no, that sounds really very formal...persistence, perseverance- maybe... but poetry?... well... maybe I'll give it a whirl...any-ways, mammy, I'm off...uh-huh? Yes, alright then-bye mams.

## scene five

*(Kurt Weill's tune plays as we cross-fade to a dialling Vanessa.)*

**Vanessa** Hello Orton, it's Vanessa...notsoperky- listen here my boy- oh?... ..No, Griffen was never in Guatemala!...I doubt it...No, you may not have more money Orton, it's been more than a month and you've done nothing but dig up drifters and, and- in fact, if you haven't come up with something solid by week's end, I'm afraid I'm going to be asking for my money back...I'm giving you until Saturday, alright? And you best bring either extensive evidence of your investigations, or my money- okay? Okay.

## scene six

*(Again, a selection from the PDQ Bach. Lights divulge an Orton labouring over a poem in the vicinity of the lefthand plinth.)*

**Orton** Vanessa...'Nessa....hmm...Nessy...yes...Nessy, my heart is...messy... You can fix...my broken...stuff...hmm, no...you can restore...yes...my broken stuff...no, no, no...you can restore my broken...core...(and stuff)...excellent!...

Buffalos & Bees,  
Unforgettable Trees,  
Bread as to Butter,  
You make my friend flutter.

Nessie,  
My heart is messy.  
You can restore,  
My Broken Core (and stuff)  
From now,  
Til ever-more.

Yes! Thanks Ma! (Orton paces as he rehearses his upcoming phone call) Good evening Vanessa...Good evening Vanessa... ..no, uh...*(chuckles)* Hello darling- it's Ort...no, definitely not...Good Evening Vanessa... ..uh...is that the lovely Vanessa? It's Orton here...Good Evening...Good Evening Vanessa...etc. *(He dials. But when she picks up he unfortunately finds himself with an anxiety-strained, squeaking*

*falsetto.*) Hi there!... ..uh...it's me ... .. Gideon...Wrong number, Wrong Number! *(He slams the phone down.)* Jeepers Creepers, Gee Whiz, Gee Whillikers, Dadburned, Doggone, Goshdarn- DANG!

## scene seven

*(Cross-fade back to the Cafe with an extract from Avro Part's "Wenn Bach Bienen Gezuchtet hatte"- to be found on the "Collage" CD. Orton is waiting. A waiter serves.)*

**Waiter** Are you quite sure you wouldn't rather I kept the tea warm until your young lady friend arrives?

**Orton** Quite.

**Waiter** Very well.

*(The waiter exits on one side as Vanessa enters from the other.)*

**Orton** Vanessa, babushkin!

**Vanessa** Alright Orton, got anything?

**Orton** Wha-? No small talk? No chit chat?

**Vanessa** No fooling around.

**Orton** *(seductively)* Look, Vanessa...I've ordered rose tea.

**Vanessa** I'm earnest Orton. If you've nothing substantial, then I want back that money you've so swiftly pocketed.

**Orton** Relax, Bolero...unbend.

**Vanessa** Oh, I'm so upset with myself...I've no idea what possessed me to believe you'd ever be able to find anyone.

**Orton** Hang on toots, why not wait til we see what we've got here before venting spleen? huh? hmm? Didn't I tell you I was on to something?

**Vanessa** Yes, forty-eight times! If he's not some psychic in Cleveland, he's a Chinese amputee!

**Orton** Now look- I may have been somewhat excessive in my initial ventures, but all this time, I've not been idle, oh no my girl, I've not been resting on my oars, no sir, I've not been coasting down no royal road... *(He begins elaborately digging around in his briefcase amongst notes & ledgers, files & folders, pens & pencils. Eventually he produces a scruffy piece of paper which he proudly presents to her.)* Hitherto, I'll be focusing all my energies...on one crucial fact, namely that (and this I've recently discovered), that your Griffen...Mister Krell...holds the world record...here it is...for juggling whilst jogging...i.e. joggling?

*(Vanessa hands back the paper.)*

**Vanessa** No, that's someone else.

**Orton** Two people with the same name? Griffen Krell? Surely not!

**Vanessa** If that was all you have, it's hardly good enough.

**Orton** Uhh...not quite...

*(pause. He starts digging anew.)*

**Vanessa** Well?

**Orton** There's also the issue of...you see...look at this...here's what I really wanted to

show you...you see, in this rough sketch I've made of Griffen's tie collection, one makes out the faint impression of...a six pointed star...Tell me Vanessa, did Griffen ever mention...Zion?

**Vanessa** Orton-

**Orton** Yes dear?

**Vanessa** Do I strike you as being educationally...subnormal?

**Orton** I'm sorry?

**Vanessa** What I mean is- do I look as though I might be two sandwiches short of a picnic?

**Orton** *(thoughtfully)* No.

**Vanessa** Soft in the head?

**Orton** *(again, thinking)* No.

**Vanessa** Cerebrally challenged?

**Orton** No, no, and a third time no! If this preposterous notion has been introduced to your thinking by that dastardly Griffen, then-

**Vanessa** No, Orton, it's you who seems to consider me intellectually deficient.

**Orton** But Vanessa! I've never once thought you're not sixteen annas to the rupee!

**Vanessa** Then why are you feeding me this gobbledegook?

**Orton** Wha-?...I'm stunned...I'm really and truly...astonished...You honestly think I'd be stringing you along, all the while, just so as...just so as- what? Why would I do such a thing?

**Vanessa** Because you're still hoping to bed me?

**Orton** Dadblast Vanessa! I'm mortified, I'm mollified, I'm moribund, I mean...I'm appalled, I'm abased...I mean, gee whillikers -

**Vanessa** Admit it!

**Orton** Alright, it's true.

**Vanessa** You're all the same.

**Orton** I'm all the same? I'm all the same as Orton T. Norton, that may be true, but truth be told Vanessa-

**Vanessa** Yes, tell me the truth. What else do you want from me? Money?

**Orton** No!

**Vanessa** Then what?

**Orton** But...Vanessa, isn't it obvious...I love you-

**Vanessa** Really?!

**Orton** Indubitably.

**Vanessa** Are you serious?

**Orton** Does a cavalryman ride a cavalry horse...? Does a bear run into the woods only to find there...that selfsame cavalryman...on that very same cavalry horse?...Answer me!

**Vanessa** Orton-

**Orton** Wait- let me speak...I'm not very good at this boys & girls business...and you know, since I've known you, I've known you to be a bit on the wild and sultry side, so...after detail-ed consideration, I settled on this rather direct approach- raw, radical honesty, I'm sorry if my sex appeals have offended you...I can do Romantic, sure I can...I've a fair hand at poesy, and so forth-. But I thought that a straightforward style might win you over...I'm only looking for a way to your heart, Vanessa, believe me.

**Vanessa** Ortie, I'm flattered, but really...we're so utterly different.

**Orton** And yet...it was my understanding that opposites attracted...?

**Vanessa** We will never be lovers.  
**Orton** But, but...I can be good for you, I can-  
**Vanessa** You can't make me love you...Griffin's the only man for whom my heart will ever yearn.  
**Orton** I'm afraid you leave me little choice, my sweet...

*(Vanessa is being melodramatic at the stage front, facing the audience. Orton has meanwhile whipped out a tiny vial of peculiarly coloured potion. He proceeds to drip a few drops of it into her tea before continuing his exploration of love unrequited.)*

**Orton** *(sobs)* Oh Nussy...what's wrong with me?...why is it you think it's so completely impossible that you could ever love such a one as I?  
**Vanessa** Orton- you wear two different socks.  
**Orton** I have two different feet, don't I?  
**Vanessa** I wouldn't know what to do with you.  
**Orton** Individuality for feet!

*(The waiter, namely Griffen, walks on bearing a tea tray.)*

**Vanessa** Griffen!  
**Griffen** Vanessa?  
**Orton** Avast!  
**Vanessa** What are you doing here?  
**Griffen** I'm...uh...serving tea, I believe.

**The remainder of this play has been deleted from this preview copy.**

For further details on purchasing a full copy of the script, or for information on royalties, please contact

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