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Dramatic Publishing

COURTING VAMPIRES

By

LAURA SCHELLHARDT

Please Note: This excerpt contains strong language.



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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“World premiere of *Courting Vampires* produced by
The Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena, California, 2009.”

The world premiere of *Courting Vampires* was produced by The Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena, California, May-June 2009. The director was Jessica Kubzansky and the assistant director was Lisa Szolovits. The cast was as follows:

Rill Carey Peters
Nina Maya Lawson
Man Bo Foxworth

PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Stage Manager Hope Villanueva
Set Designer Kurt Boetcher
Props Designer Nick Santiago
Costume Designer E.B. Brooks
Lighting Designer Tim Swiss
Sound Designer Bruno Louchouarn
Company Manager Cheryl Rizzo

“At a trial, events are often seen in a distorted perspective. A violent event has taken place, and we work backwards from it, considering primarily the evidence bearing on that event. If we work forwards, in a natural sequence, from a natural starting point, this evidence may wear a very different appearance.”

— Julian Symons
A Reasonable Doubt

Courting Vampires

Characters:

RILL ARCHER the older sister

NINA ARCHER the younger sister

MAN everyone in between

Time:

Before and after. And during, briefly.

Setting:

Testimonials take place in a courtroom. The courtroom exists in Rill's mind. The sense of one light source. The sense of the room getting smaller. There is a screen in the room. For projections. For shadows. For evidence. The screen also serves as a hospital curtain.

All other action takes place where it takes place.

A note about Rill:

Periodically Rill “buries” an emotion. These burials should be silent and physically realized. They signify a temporary movement inward and away. They signify someone re-establishing order. The burials may be physically grand or physically subtle. They need not make cognizant sense. Whatever movement occurs should be the same each time. The duration of the movement need not be.

A note about Nina:

She has the pace and feel of a bottle rocket.

ACT ONE

— Testimonial —

(It's dark. We're all sitting in the dark as we sometimes do, listening to a sound. Like someone punching through paper. Like gunshots hitting no mark. Like many small explosions.

Then it's not dark anymore. There are bursts of color above and showering over us. The explosions continue but now there's someone below them. A girl. She's looking at the sky. Color streaks across her face. She is breathless, like a child with a wrapped box. But she's older than that. Probably in her twenties but with a spirit like hers, who can tell. She has her hands up, clenched in fists, and POW POW POW, her fists hit the air and explosions sound and color streaks her face and the sky catches fire.

Ah. These are fireworks. And she's boxing. We're all in the dark watching a woman-looking girl boxing fireworks in the sky.

Then another woman joins us. Late twenties and looks it—the spirit matches the face here. She has stepped into

the space though she and this boxer are time frames apart. She has something to tell us. It doesn't look good.)

RILL. That's my sister Nina. Boxing fireworks. There's a delay between launch and detonation. About 4 seconds. 1, 2, 3—

(Four—NINA punches the sky to an explosion of color and sound.)

RILL (*cont'd*). Where she is it's the Fourth of July. Where she is every day is the Fourth of July. She loved it that much. I mean look at her.

(NINA punches the sky to an explosion of color and sound.)

RILL (*cont'd*). What I know about fireworks is that they originated in China in 1000 A.D. They were looking for immortality.

They found gunpowder. What I know about fireworks is that each one is a mixture of metal salts. Reds are strontium carbonate. Greens are barium nitrate. Blues are copper chloride, and that sound? That sound is powdered titanium which burns so fast they call it lightning of the earth. Like her. She's that kind of lightning. I mean look at her.

(NINA punches the sky to an explosion of color and sound.)

RILL (*cont'd*). That is what I know about fireworks. It's not a great deal but it's relevant. And let me assure you. What I know about justice is far more extensive.

(RILL sets up her courtroom. Screen. Gavel. Scales of Justice.)

RILL (*cont'd*). This is my courtroom. No need to rise. We're already in session. The case you're about to witness is, like most legal proceedings, nothing less or more than a sequence of events. However. At the end of this particular sequence, I kill a man. I shoot him. I stab him. I bury him face down in the ground. Yes, that is the *end* of this particular sequence, but as I intend remind you. There are events which came before.

I will therefore be acting "in propria persona." On my own behalf. And Nina. Nina is my opening statement. Proof that there are, on occasion, reasons for a person to...for a woman to...for a sister to...well. That there are reasons for seemingly unreasonable actions. I mean look at her.

(NINA punches the air one last time. On this final explosion an image hits the screen. A large dark blotch. It resembles a stain.)

— **Evidence** —

(Before. A hospital room. DOCTOR Whoosit assessing the stain. NINA behind a hospital curtain under fluorescent lights.)

RILL *(to us)*. As the first order of business. Defense calls a bright December day. 34 degrees outside.

DOCTOR *(to RILL)*. Ms. Archer...?

RILL. Defense calls St. Francis Clinic—somehow colder than that.

DOCTOR. Ms. Archer...?

RILL. And defense calls one Dr...Whoosit.

DOCTOR. Ms. Rill Archer...?

(RILL's attention on the DOCTOR. Finally.)

DOCTOR *(cont'd)*. I know this is difficult... Probably not what you were expecting... I mean you're bound to have questions—do you have any questions—just holler if you have any questions... You don't strike me as someone who hollers... Right. I'll just go over it again then, this is a slide of your sister's blood cell.

RILL. It's roughly a foot in diameter, is it not?

DOCTOR. Well it's magnified. Many many...many times.

RILL. One would hope. She would otherwise have to be very very...very large.

DOCTOR. Right... Ms. Archer, I wanted to explain all this in layman's terms, it's less daunting, but you said—

RILL. Medical language please—

DOCTOR. You said—

RILL. Medical terms. Idiolect. Vernacular, jargon, argot, patois. Medical-ese. Please. You did fine Dr. Whoosit.

DOCTOR. Actually my name's Dr.—

RILL. No. Please. You did fine.

DOCTOR. Well thank you but I'm not sure you grasp the severity of—

RILL. My sister's skin is many shades. Violet, the most recent addition. She wakes up at night. Steaming. 103 degrees. At last count. She has trouble standing upright in the morning. She leans on chairs and... (*this is too personal*) ...well. She is 15 pounds lighter. She worries she looks like an insect. She coughs incessantly. Her throat burns. She suffers from malaise. She is not herself.

DOCTOR. Yes. I mean no. No and yes—

RILL. No and yes?

DOCTOR. She probably doesn't seem like herself—is what I mean—

RILL. No. Because there is something traveling through her blood. Is that right? Her blood is turncoat. Turning against its maker. And therefore. She is not herself because herself is, in a sense, attacking herself.

DOCTOR. Yes.

RILL. Just yes, or no and yes?

DOCTOR. Yes you seem to understand the situation.

RILL. I'm living with the "situation," Dr. Whoosit.

DOCTOR. Actually it's Dr.—

RILL. No. Please. Just give me the antibiotics and we'll be on our way.

DOCTOR. Antibiotics?

RILL. Yes, yes. The sequence is simple. Clean sheets. Two blankets. Cold compress. Dim lights. Antibiotics. Four

days. Fine. Most people require five days. Nina's fine in four.

DOCTOR. Ah. It seems I haven't been clear.

RILL. We will be sure to finish the bottle—

DOCTOR. There are treatments to alleviate pressure—

RILL. She's not allergic to medications—

DOCTOR. I can certainly take the edge off any pain—

RILL. We'll take it with meals, we'll avoid excess sun—

DOCTOR. But let me say this in a way I think you'll understand—

RILL. The sequence is very clear—

DOCTOR. There's no "four days fine" in this sequence. I'm sorry.

(A moment.)

RILL. Is my sister in extremis...Doctor?

DOCTOR. In extremis?

RILL. Facing imminent death.

DOCTOR. Well...in a way we're all facing it—

RILL. Is her face closer to it. Than ours is?

DOCTOR. Yes.

RILL. How close is close?

(No response.)

RILL *(cont'd)*. I see. Not yet but soon. No and yes.

DOCTOR. Ms. Archer—

RILL. I require a moment.

(A burial. Seconds pass as...)

DOCTOR. I'm sorry, there is one more thing I'm required to... Does your sister... I'm sorry but I have to ask. Does your sister have a sexual partner?

(And RILL is back.)

RILL. You're not her type.

DOCTOR. No no, I meant concerning—

RILL. You're sensitive and ineffectual. She would never invite you in.

DOCTOR. I meant concerning—

RILL. She hasn't, has she? Invited you in?

DOCTOR. I MEANT CONCERNING THE DISEASE. It's contracted, do you understand, someone gave it to her.

RILL. Someone GAVE it to her? Gave as in furnished, as in conferred, as in bestowed as one would a GIFT?

DOCTOR. Perhaps I should speak to your sister.

(RILL grabs onto his wrist. Quickly. With unnatural strength.)

RILL. No.

DOCTOR. Please let go of my arm—

RILL. We're a closed system, Nina and I.

DOCTOR. Ms. Archer, your grip is too tight.

RILL. That girl in there, turning, represents the other half of a one two system. She is one. I am two. And from now on—

DOCTOR. You're cutting off the circulation—

RILL. From now on—

DOCTOR. FOR GOD'S SAKE LET GO.

RILL. Our system will remain closed is that clear, our system will remain closed.

(RILL releases her grip.)

RILL *(cont'd)*. Now. Dr. Whoosit—

DOCTOR. IT'S DR.—

RILL. No name. It will stick. I'd rather it didn't. Write out the treatments. List the instructions, in order mind the order. And give what you have to me.

(DR. WHOOSIT writes the prescriptions. Reluctantly.)

RILL *(cont'd)*. Please include a refill of Xanax. For my father. He's on Xanax. Thus far it has worked well, though the bottle's a problem.

DOCTOR. I'm sorry?

RILL. He's afraid of the bottle. That the Xanax comes in. Fear of plastic. Is what he suffers from at the moment.

(Behind the screen, NINA makes shadow puppets with her hands. Attacking the stain.)

RILL *(cont'd)*. She's in there by herself. She'll be cursing your lights. They're fluorescents. She hates fluorescents.

DOCTOR. She's young. She'll hold herself together.

RILL. Repeat that.

DOCTOR *(a brief rewind)*. She'll hold herself together.

RILL. That's what I thought. Stop please.

(Action in the scene suspends as RILL addresses us.)

RILL (*cont'd*). I pause here to make one clear point. Anyone who says, of my sister Nina—

DOCTOR (*a brief rewind*). She'll hold herself together—

RILL. Doesn't know my sister Nina.

NINA (*from behind the curtain*). Rill?

RILL. Nina doesn't hold herself together.

NINA. Rill.

RILL. Nina flies apart.

NINA. RILL.

RILL. In several directions.

NINA. RILLY!!!

RILL. On a regular basis.

NINA (*in one breath*). Rill Rill Rill Rill RILLLLLLLLLLL!

RILL. Exhibits A-D. My sister Nina. On an average day.

(Suddenly NINA is with us. There's a fast pulse to her speech. Hardly time to breathe.)

NINA (*terror*). I've got an audition, Rilly, do you know what that means? They're gonna stick us in that long fluorescent hallway—I hate fluorescents—make your skin all pasty make your veins pop out—I FUCKING HATE FLUORESCENTS—I can't do it, Rilly—all those girls—thin and tall and thin—like it's unnatural thin—like it's thin thin thin and me—who am I kidding—I'm not going—I don't need this shit today.

RILL. Later.

NINA (*wrath*). What if I start screaming? What if I just run down that hallway screaming “WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU ALL FROM”—that'd freak those girls out, right? Send 'em scurrying like the thin little insects—like the THIN-SECTS they are—and me screaming after

them—"I know where you're from. You're from front walks and rock gardens and peach fucking pie. You're from turtlenecks and teal and fuck-all French silk. Yeah you better run 'cause where I'm from—we tear your shit up."

RILL. Later.

NINA (*grandiose despair*). We're none of us equal in that hallway, Rilly. I'm dishwasher, they're wine. They're a fold-it-all service and I'm laundry on a line. We're nowhere near equal and I tell you what, they want to kill me. And I tell you more than what. Sometimes I wish they would.

RILL. Later.

NINA (*victory*). So the big shots inside start calling names, right? And everyone's equal on the page. Called my name like everybody else. And then we're in another room against another wall, line of French manicures and me, but it don't matter see, because this room has a floor. This room has a dance floor. And the other girls—they're stiff, they're polite. Like it's an apology this dance they're doing—like they're sorry for sticking out their arms, for leaping up high, for TAKING UP SPACE— And all of a sudden I know something true. These girls—they've had work done, but I'VE DONE THE WORK. I get up there and the balance is off, Rill, Lady Justice is justing towards me for a change. And those thinsects REALLY wanna kill me now. 'Cause there's a line through their names but there're stars around mine—MY name looks like a fucking firework now, POW POW POW. Yeah, in the hallway they're tops and on the page we're the same, but on the floor? Hell there is no one like me on the floor.

(NINA in the light. Triumphant.)

RILL *(to us)*. Now just for a few seconds. Imagine telling this woman. This woman. That she is going to die...

(A brief moment of attempt.)

RILL *(cont'd)*. But we can't do that yet. That's out of sequence. We have to go back. We have to go months back to a Friday in September. Yes. Defense calls a small house. A small town. And the day it all began.

(The hospital room disappears. And with it the stain.)

— **Evidence** —

(Before. NINA, RILL and FATHER in the Archer family kitchen. Small. Sterile. Low income. Alive. NINA and FATHER huddle together. RILL is potting a plant.)

FATHER. The way I see it, we need ourselves some rope, a sack, and a six-foot hole in the backyard. Preferably out of the light.

NINA. That's it, Dad. Go on and lay it all out. How're we gonna do it?

RILL. What are you two going to do?

NINA. We're gonna kill Ray Jenkins.

RILL. Ray Jenkins the mailman Ray Jenkins?

FATHER. Ray Jenkins the pervert rat-bastard Ray Jenkins.

NINA. He tried to put his hand up my skirt. So we're gonna kill him. Right, Dad?