



Van Helsing Season 4 Episode 2 Review: Dark Ties

Van Helsing introduces new characters and narrative twists as Vanessa moves against the Dark One.

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Van Helsing Season 4 Episode 2

“This is for the good of mankind as well as my daughter.”

For a brief moment I feared *Van Helsing* was about to let a golden chainsaw opportunity slip by untouched, but our hero, once again, comes to the rescue. Though things calm down a bit after last week’s frenzied bloodfest, “Dark Ties” introduces some juicy new details and several alluring characters that stand to take Vanessa and the narrative in a new direction.

Intriguing individuals and groups come and go in Vanessa's life, and even though they eventually abandon her for one reason or another, she generally takes something of value away from the experience. Tonight, we're treated to another spectacular cold open that introduces Vanessa to a pocket of survivors led by a small group of women who clearly possess formidable vampire fighting skills. Former showrunner Neil LaBute momentarily teases us with a chainsaw that won't fire up during a skirmish with some feeders, but Vanessa enters the picture, starts it with one pull, and then cleanly removes the vampire's head from its body. Okay, so maybe it wasn't that clean after all when you consider the now ubiquitous shot of Vanessa's blood spattered face we find both captivating and disgusting.

It's always nice to see Vanessa interrupt her slaying with a brief respite and a return to some semblance of normalcy, however short lived. She makes an immediate connection with Jack (Nicole Munoz/Defiance), whose story appears to mirror some of her own experiences. Like Vanessa's early motivation, Jack tells her she's looking for her family, but "these people need me. Someone like me." Other than Scarlett, Vanessa's had few in her life to whom she could relate and open up emotionally, so watching these two sip beers together in a makeshift karaoke bar suggests Vanessa might give up her loner status and join this group.

However, this meeting reveals an even more significant change in Vanessa when she tells Jack that "I think I'm having a spiritual awakening. I can't keep killing." Throughout their conversation we see both women smile, something Vanessa rarely does, but she has to know that it will be virtually impossible to avoid excessive violence on her journey to the Dark One. Still, Jack forces the issue and when she finds Vanessa sneaking away without saying goodbye, the suggestion that meeting this group might be her destiny doesn't fall on deaf ears.

Regardless, even though she strikes out on her own, Vanessa's desire to emerge from a darkness that has engulfed her from the early days of *The Rising* receives its first test when she encounters Chad and Tabby. In a nice call back to the caged vampire Doc being cared for by Axel, Chad feeds Tabby his own blood when he is unable to procure it elsewhere. Vanessa quickly realizes the traps Chad sets are for humans, and even though he wants to be left alone in his guilt, Vanessa has other ideas. Of course, Vanessa has turned vampires before, but she approaches Tabby's return with a changed sense of self. As the young woman regains her bearings, she asks the obvious question. "What are you?" to which Vanessa replies, "The light."

Vanessa has reached a crossroads of sorts, and her desire to revamp her approach moving forward, while noble, may not come as easily as she hopes. Placing Tabby and Chad in Jack's care, Vanessa symbolically gives her sword to Jack as a sign that while she may have no choice but to kill again, without her weapon of choice close at hand, she might consider another approach first. "I don't kill anymore; I save." Time will tell, but she can't save everyone.

The addition of Hansen's adopted daughter Violet (Keeya King) adds another intriguing dynamic, and her quick connection with Julius suggests this aspect of the story may move in a different direction. There are few characters that possess the loyalty and high moral fiber Julius faithfully exhibits, and it's just like him to approach training Violet in a manner contrary to her former handlers. He correctly explains she's been trained to fight the wrong enemy. Though she sometimes comes across as a petulant child oblivious to the true realities outside the compound

walls, her humanity immediately presents itself when she believes she's seriously wounded Julius during their session. However, it's her reaction to his assessment that she's not ready that hints at something more than a superficial reading. "Maybe I know more than you realize."

We've understood for a while now that the heart of the Van Helsing tale resides in blood, and while that may rank as the understatement of the century, we now must confront the possibility that Vanessa may not be the sole genetic anomaly we once thought. Doc long ago posited that the answer lies in the blood, and now that Julius and Violet's blood appear to possess some of the same properties as Vanessa's, the tide quickly turns. Of course, it's always difficult to know what Doc's thinking and what the truth regarding her research really is, so when she tells Avery that she's "close," it doesn't take long to learn Doc's ulterior motive. Whether Doc is stalling isn't clear at this point, but she's apparently earned enough good will that Avery gives her the available Loveland files meant to assist in finding word on Jolene. Will she abandon her research to seek Jolene? Magic 8-Ball says, "Likely."

Nevertheless, it's Violet that now stands at the center of the narrative, and her reckless behavior nearly ends in disaster when she's attacked by a group of vampires. Whether she's had enough time to absorb the nuances of Julius' training gets answered rather quickly, and while she seems to make inroads, it's clear she needs more time. When she's bitten and the vampire then coughs up the black goo we know indicates a return to the human state, Blak Tek's involvement once again must be factored into the equation. That she has no idea what just happened, indicates that her father may, in fact, be using her as a guinea pig in his war against the vampires.

However, Julius understands the significance of what's just happened and urges Violet to keep quiet about the evening's events. It's difficult to blame him for alerting Doc to Violet's power, but Doc's inability to exert restraint again compromises hers and Julius' safety. It seems difficult to believe that Hansen has no idea as to his daughter's genetic makeup and power, and yet again, Doc's erratic behavior lands her in a jail cell. Despite her plea that "she's the missing piece to this whole thing," Hansen's reply can only be interpreted as at least partially disingenuous. "This is for the good of mankind as well as my daughter." Whether there's any truth to either of those statements remains to be seen, but to this point, Hansen only seems to care about himself and those for whom he works.

Now that some sort of psychic connection might exist between those with special blood, it will be interesting to see what Julius reveals about Vanessa and whether he possesses the same abilities. "Dark Ties" focuses on Vanessa and Blak Tek, and hopefully we won't have to wait too long for that inevitable confrontation between the last Van Helsing and the Fourth Elder. Chances are this time she won't be alone.