



# Van Helsing Episode 8

## Review: Little Thing

All is not what it seems on this week's Van Helsing.



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There was a time during the first six episodes of SyFy's **Van Helsing** that I thought Neil LaBute and Simon Barry

might be trying to do too much with their unique take on the classic vampire tale. I admit it; I was wrong. “Little Thing,” the season’s eighth episode, deftly builds on last week’s brilliantly depicted revelation that these desperate individuals are grasping at their last shreds of humanity while the world outside goes to hell.

As the season’s progressed, we’ve gained an understanding about the vampire hierarchy, and while the fact that there seem to be at least three power brokers vying for dominance continues to be a bit overwhelming, the confirmation that “The Ancients” control the streets helps bring this situation into focus. But what “Little Thing” does so well is to provide a glimpse into a softer side of the characters, who even though they still remain on high alert, revel in the opportunity to return to a normal life if only for a few hours.

We don’t know yet why it is that Julius prefers to live in apparent squalor while Rebecca chooses a more genteel lifestyle, but the episode’s opening scene in which Sheema wakes up in a nice bed, a bowl of fresh fruit off to the side, illuminates the fact that the vampire lifestyle doesn’t necessarily have to remain hidden in the shadows. Does Rebecca represent the new normal? She tells Sheema that she can have a nice life, and while the symbolism of the caged bird sitting on the table may be lost on the young woman, it is most certainly not on the viewer.

We've all seen the **Mad Max** movies, so the fact that Axel's first stop after leaving the hospital involves filling gas cans is somewhat comforting. Set against a serious conversation Vanessa has with Axel, Susan and Sam successfully siphon gas from an abandoned car which leads to a fit of joyous spontaneity we've not seen in **Van Helsing**. We know the separation from Mohamad continues to plague Sam, so it's really heartwarming to see him celebrate with Susan over such an ordinary triumph. And it's here that writer/showrunner LaBute throws another iron into the fire since Vanessa realizes that going to the army base may not be in her best interests. Given what we know about Doc's sister and the people for whom she works, Vanessa's admission of concern may signal that the government's out there after the same prize as Julius, Dmitri, and Rebecca. And what about the government experiments? Searching her sister's office at the base, Doc and Vanessa come across a folder labeled "File 281 The Farm." Could Vanessa have been part of a clandestine experiment even before the vampire apocalypse?

Another nice touch by director Jason Priestley (**Dark Matter, Saving Hope**) is the tattered American flag still flying at the base's perimeter gate when Axel and the others finally arrive. Coupled with the flag on the wall inside the base, these two images beautifully remind us of the power of the indomitable human spirit. Once inside they hunker down in what looks like a motor pool and resume behaviors that must seem like distant memories. Susan cuts her hair while Vanessa holds a

mirror, and the female bonding touches us for a number of reasons not the least of which is that it constitutes an important stage in their progression. They don't want to forget what it means to be human. Axel gives Doc the best pillow he can find and mentions fruit cocktail, but there's a subtle awkwardness present especially with these two. Having kept her alive all that time with his own blood, Axel's connection to Doc must be confusing, and her abrupt reaction underscores the difficulty in simply picking up where they left off.

But amidst the long awaited chance to let their guards down, lies the mystery surrounding the fact the a United States Marine base stands deserted with no indication of casualties. Were they run off by vampires? Recalled for support elsewhere? It is puzzling though that when the group decides to leave the base and head for "The Farm," they don't commandeer another vehicle or two and add to their depleting arsenal. And just for good measure we're tossed another clue since we learned from Vanessa's file that she and Doc found, that "The Farm" is mentioned among these papers. Its presence is ominous when they first run across it, and it's equally so now that they've arrived at this subterranean shelter. Unfortunately, getting past "The Farm's" locked entrance leads to a cave-in leaving them trapped, but the fact that they seem to put this aside long enough to eat, get drunk, and attempt a little physical human contact speaks to the weariness that blankets them. Nonetheless, the episode's final scene finds John and Susan, drunk and alone in a hallway, and when he becomes sexually

aggressive, she tells him to back off which he refuses to do. Now, I don't think there's anyone out there that likes John, especially since he's done everything he can do to subvert Vanessa and Axel's leadership, so when he meets his demise at the end of Vanessa's knife, no one sheds a tear. However, is he really the murderer that the contents of his bag suggest? This may be a bit too convenient, and as Vanessa states, "I hope to God we were right."

Maybe it's that I've become more comfortable in the universe LaBute and Barry have created, but now, even though we really haven't been given any answers, only some clarifications, that several more clues have been thrown into the mix, only adds to my engagement. As if the government experiments Doc's sister was involved with and Dmitri's Mengele wannabe aren't enough, Rebecca has her own science lab humming, though its goal proves to be a bit different. Apparently she (all female vampires?) can give life but not create it. How do the surrogate mothers become impregnated? Are they implanted? Why isn't the old fashioned way of creating a vampire good enough?

And finally, what is it with photographs? Fans of **Westworld** continue to mull over the photo found in the dirt at Dolores' home, and now Mohamad has a folded photo of Vanessa. "I'm going to find you no matter what." Wait. What? And who or what was in the other half of the photo? I'm going to go out on a limb here and speculate that John and Mohamad are not who they purport to be,

and in fact, may be working for forces outside the vampire network with the express purpose of tracking down Vanessa.

“Little Thing” is a huge success, as it puts on display life’s small details often taken for granted and magnifies them, demanding we acknowledge how precious they really are. And heading into the back half of the season, it’s the little things that make **Van Helsing** such a captivating experience.

**5/5 STARS**