

## THE LIBRARY DUETS II: BATS

*(Betty and Vince in the library. Betty in a chair with a newspaper, Vince paces in front of the bookcases, rolling a half-dollar across his knuckles.)*

BETTY

Seven letters. Starts with F-E-S-T.

VINCE

Hmm. Fest... "Festive." "Festoon." "Festino," an entertainment or feast.

BETTY

Wait for the clue, Vince. *(Reading.)* "Pustulates." Ah, wait, "festers."  
*(Writing.)* F-E-S-T-E-R-S.

VINCE

I prefer "festino."

BETTY

You have to go with the clues, Vince. That's why they take the space to print them.

VINCE

Thank you, Betty. If you don't mind, I'll continue to work my jigsaw puzzles face down.

BETTY

Face down.

VINCE

The puzzles, Betty, not me.

BETTY

You're a gray guy, Vince.

VINCE

*(Moves out from behind the bar, brings his imaginary cape over his face.)* A gray ghost.  
*(Lowers it a bit.)* Will you be ready soon for tonight?

BETTY

What do you mean “tonight”?

VINCE

Tonight, my love. The moon is high, the sky is pitch, the bats are on their little wings.  
For you and me there is only...tonight.

BETTY

Can you sing it, Vince?

VINCE

Can I sing it! *(Takes a breath.)*

BETTY

Before you start I need to tell you this: The tonight you speak of is not tonight. Tonight is tomorrow night.

VINCE

Ah! Tonight is not tonight. Tomorrow is tonight. I may be starting to see.

BETTY

Think about it, Vince, now think...

VINCE

I think I may know, Betty. *(Hands to temples.)* But go ahead.

BETTY

If your tonight were tonight, we'd surely be dressed by now.

*She returns to her puzzle.*

And we're not.

*Vince examines himself.*

VINCE

Dressed? You mean in costume. So you admit you're not ready.

BETTY

Guilty. Now, Vince, come here and look at this paper.

VINCE

Why? What's on it, in it?

BETTY

It's harmless. But come look.

VINCE

*(Approaching cautiously.)* I'm a little nervous about this.

*(He closes in and begins to peer over her shoulder.)*

BETTY

Up here, in the corner. *(She begins to lift the paper for him.)*

VINCE

*(Reading.)* ...now believe that the ship's anxious crew members, not a German U-boat...

BETTY

*(Pushes the paper in his face.)* THE DATE, VINCE! LOOK AT THE DATE!

VINCE

*(Reading.)* October 30. Is this today's?

BETTY

Vince. It's eight o'clock. Has our doorbell been ringing? Have teeny terrorists been extorting our candy? Have flaming shitbags been left on the porch to stamp out?

VINCE

*(Understanding.)* Ah, tonight is tomorrow night. For now we can relax. *(He sits in the other chair.)*

BETTY

You go ahead. I'm already there.

*(Vince sits in the chair with his hands folded, his head back. Soon restless, he begins to stretch his neck back and forth over his shoulders, to manipulate and crack his neck.)*

*Betty refuses to watch.*

*Vince picks up the remote control from the table. He aims it at the stereo and hits a button. He keeps aiming and squeezing.)*

BETTY

Vince! Turn that down. *(He does so, quickly.)*

For once. For just one October thirtieth, stop being such... *(pause)*

VINCE

What, Betty, what? Stop being what? Such a child?

BETTY

Forget it, Vince, forget it. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say.... *Don't stop; it's all right.*

VINCE

Don't stop being a child.

BETTY

*(Still subdued.)* Yeah. Don't stop being a child. Everyone should do what he's good at. After all, it's Hallowe'en.

VINCE

I beg your pardon.

BETTY

OK. It's almost Hallowe'en.

VINCE

Am I still your favorite spook?

BETTY

The hobgoblin of my little mind. Is this taking us anywhere?

VINCE

This? Taking?

BETTY

What do we have with this conversation? With this evening? In this library? What do we have with each other?

VINCE

We'll always have...Key Largo.

BETTY

That's Paris.

VINCE

But you're Betty, not Ingrid. Besides, I meant Key West. *(He's moving now, using his hands.)* A swordfish cuts high into the air. Gulls dive at every glint in the waves. The flaking hull of our skiff slides through the chop of the morning sea, and dolphins -- they could be sharks -- track our progress with their fins. We're barefoot with our slacks rolled up. Soon we lose sight of the highest palms. We're alone.

BETTY

That was Doris, Vince, not me. You're alone with Doris. And her...tan.

VINCE

Ah! *(Pause.)* But it might have been you. Let's have a drink. *(He moves quickly to the bar.)* Besides, as golden as she may have been, Doris can only ever be a symbol.

BETTY

Of what, I can just imagine.

VINCE

Perhaps, Betty, of you. And in our Key West scenario the sea is a metaphor as well.

BETTY

Oh, yeah? What's the metaphoree?

VINCE

It may be, Betty, it might be...this library.

BETTY

And books are boats? Mighty frigates?

VINCE

And all that.

BETTY

Mix those drinks. *(She stands up and moves to the shelves with her newspaper.)*

VINCE

I trust, Betty, that you're maintaining your ethical standards over there.

BETTY

As always, Vince. The cruciverbalist's code. *(She looks for a book.)*

VINCE

Then stay away from the dictionary.

BETTY

Just to confirm a spelling.

VINCE

Give me the word. I'll confirm it.

BETTY

Thanks, Vince, but I can do it myself. *(She keeps looking.)*

VINCE

You can't just look up the words, Betty; the puzzle itself should corroborate or deny. Vertical provides confirmation for horizontal. *(Puts down the drinks.)* Across puts the question to down, and down says yes or no. *(Moves quickly across to Betty.)*

BETTY

Stay away, Vince. This is for me to decide, now stay away!

VINCE

You're not to do this, now stop! *(He reaches for her hands, but she fights him off with the newspaper, finally hitting him solid on the face. He backs away.)*

BETTY

This is private, Vince. Do you understand? *(She fingers some of the books, then tugs at them, but they don't budge.)*  
What the hell?

VINCE

What's wrong now?

BETTY

These books aren't even books, or shelves; they're bindings glued to the walls. Frank the Fuck. When he sold us this house, he made such a point...

VINCE

Of the leather bindings, Betty. And they are...*(he sweeps his hand across a shelf)*...fine leather bindings. Fine spines, anyway.

BETTY

We should have known. Anybody who combs his hair that way. *(She comes downstage and looks out.)*

VINCE

Who combs his scalp, you mean. *(He examines the shelves.)* They're really quite nice. Rich, supple. Here's the dictionary. Now what was that word?

BETTY

Don't, Vince.

VINCE

*(Struggling to remove book)* Oops, I guess we can't check it. We'll just have to let the puzzle take care of itself. *(Pause.)* Word, please. *(Pause.)* WORD, PLEASE!

BETTY

*(Turns to him and glares.)* Deoxyribonucleic acid.

VINCE

That's *two* words, last I looked.

BETTY

Yeah, that's what the clue says. "Source of life." Two words.

VINCE

OK, so what's the problem? It's "l-e," like in nucleus.

BETTY

*(Weary.)* I know that, Vince, but is it "dee-oxy" or "die-oxy"?

VINCE

*(Pacing by the books as he thinks.)* Let's work it out. What's the down word on that e or i?

BETTY

I figure it's either "fresh" or "alive."

VINCE

Clue?

BETTY

"Battery condition."

VINCE

Give me across on the fourth letter.

BETTY

*(Looking at the paper.)* "Wild animal." Five letters. Blank, blank, blank, s or v, blank.

VINCE

"Beast" or "fauve." Give me down on the b or f.



BETTY

"Fancy flyer." Blank, blank, blank, blank, f or b, blank, blank.

VINCE

Let's see. "Firefly." Or *(starts counting on his fingers)* a-c-r-o...

BETTY

*(Looking up into a corner.)* Bat.

VINCE

Right, "acrobat." We have to keep going.

BETTY

No, Vince, bat. In the corner.

*(Vince comes over to look at the puzzle.)*

No. That corner. *(She points.)*

VINCE

*(Looking.)* A bat? A bat? Are you sure it isn't a hat? Gloves, maybe?

BETTY

Up there? Why would somebody hang his hat in a twelve-foot-high corner?

VINCE

Well, I doubt if it's alive. Don't you?

BETTY

I bet it came through that broken window pane. I asked you to fix it.

VINCE

If that's a bat, he's been up there for weeks. We just never noticed.

BETTY

*(Startled.)* He can't have been up there too long; he just moved.

VINCE

No he didn't. It's the air conditioning, or the, you know, the breeze from that broken window. He's probably been there for years, nothing but a little skeleton under those wings. Just a calcium deposit with some leather attached.

BETTY

All right then, Vince, I suppose that's a calcium deposit too. *(She points to another corner.)* And that. *(Points again.)* And that. *(Again.)*

*(They draw close together and move backwards down right.)*

VINCE

Betty...

BETTY

Yeah?

VINCE

Betty...

BETTY

Yes? Yes?

VINCE

Where's my revolver? My service revolver?

BETTY

You were never *in* the service. Your knee.

VINCE

Oh, God, you're right. What about...

BETTY

There's nothing we can do. Shouldn't we just get out of here and turn off the lights maybe...and they'll fly out of here in a little while and back to their cave...

VINCE

Betty.

BETTY

Yeah?

VINCE

I think this *is* their cave. Just look around. There's another one there, and there, and there, and that...umbrella...over there. I think that's a big one. The queen maybe.

BETTY

Bats don't have queens. That's bees. Look, I think we just need to call Frank and tell him this isn't working out. I don't think I can live with this any more.

VINCE

I don't know, Betty. I don't think there's a bat clause in our contract.

BETTY

Well, what about the books? That was an out-and-out lie. Misrepresentation of a library. This isn't a library at all. It's a...a crypt.

VINCE

Doesn't a crypt have to be underground? Isn't "grotto" a more appropriate...

BETTY

Goddam it, Vince, get something and kill those things!

VINCE

Give me that newspaper! *(He grabs it out of Betty's hand.)*

BETTY

No, that's too, it's too...flimsy. And my puzzle!

*(Vince is trying with little success to climb the shelves and to swat at the bats.)*

VINCE

Bastard! Bastard! Bastard!

BETTY

*(Sensing the futility.)* Vince, you may as well just leave them alone. Besides, they can't help it; it's their home.

VINCE

*(Throwing the newspaper, which unfolds harmlessly in the air.)* They just hang there. They know I can't get at them. I can't even throw these goddam books. It's like they know it.

BETTY

*(She's gone back and folded herself in her chair.)* Maybe we should just leave them. I mean they've probably been there, here, all along. We just haven't seen them.

VINCE

What about rabies? Typhus? These things can kill you.

BETTY

Take it easy, Vince. We'll get Orkin. Besides, I read somewhere that bats are beneficial. People go to all lengths to lure them into their attics. They're wonderful predators: flies, mosquitoes, moths...

VINCE

Cocker spaniels, infants. I think you were right, Betty. We quietly move to the door and extinguish the light. The bats think it's night -- it *is* night! -- and they fly out the broken window looking for dinner. We tape a piece of cardboard into the window and seal up their cave. Tomorrow the glazier comes out.

BETTY

But, Vince.

VINCE

What?

BETTY

It just doesn't seem right.

VINCE

Right?

BETTY

The sky lightens; the little bats fly confidently back to their library; they find a stiff piece of cardboard where their door used to be; they can't get in; it's too late to find another cave; they, they...

VINCE

What, Betty, they shrivel and die? How many homeless bats have you ever seen writhing in the agony of daylight? These aren't vampires, you know, seeking their tiny coffins of native soil. They're filthy little mice, with wings. You hate mice. If we rid ourselves of these pests, it's just the ecosystem at work. Darwin and all that.

BETTY

We're *not* evicting them. Especially not on their national holiday.

VINCE

Hallowe'en is tomorrow. Remember? *(He goes to retrieve the newspaper. He looks for the puzzle and tries to fold the paper as neatly as possible. He places it on the table by Betty's chair.)*

BETTY

*(She rises to comfort him.)* We'll make it work, Vince. Peaceful coexistence. It's the right thing.

VINCE

You may not think it's the right thing when this place fills up with guano.

BETTY

*(With increasing hysteria)* OK, you're right, you're right. Maybe we are more important than the goddam bats. After all, we paid good money for this house. We deserve a bat-free environment. And books; we'll arrange for books as well, with fine leather spines like all of these on oak, no, mahogany, shelves...

VINCE

Real books will make the room smaller, you know. Eight, ten inches in on that wall.

BETTY

...and a window that's whole, tight against a hostile ecosystem...

VINCE

I think "hostile ecosystem" may be a contradiction in terms. Or a tautology maybe.

BETTY

...so turn off the fucking light!

VINCE

I'll get some cardboard.

BETTY

There's cardboard there, a piece of cardboard stuck in the back of the bar. I saw it today.

VINCE

*(At the bar he pulls out a small, irregular piece of cardboard, with strips of scotch tape attached.)*  
This may be just about right. *(He moves quickly toward the window.)*

BETTY

*(As Vince leans into the window she comes to a realization.)* Oh my God, Vince, Vince.

*(Discovering the truth, Vince suddenly stops working at the window. He turns quietly toward Betty with his head hung.)*

It does, doesn't it? It matches the break exactly. And you can see where the tape has peeled away from the glass, can't you? Each strip of tape finding its pattern of dried adhesive on the glass. And now we know...we know...

VINCE

They'll always get back in.

*(They both quietly go sit in the chairs.)*

And there's not really anything in the world we can do. I'll try calling Frank tomorrow. He may know about all this. He may have some ideas.

BETTY

He might even...he might.... There is something, Vince, that we can try. I can't tell you what's going to happen. I can't even tell you if *they* tried it, the last people here. I do know that we have to try it, try to make it work.

VINCE

I think I may know, Betty. Do I know?

BETTY

I think you know. If it won't work to turn the lights out...

VINCE

*(He's up, pacing and pointing.)* We have to keep the lights on. What about power failures, fuses, these light bulbs -- these are the same bulbs as when we...

BETTY

We have to do it, Vince. You know where fresh bulbs are, and I've seen spare fuses on the fuse box. We have to do it...or they'll wake up. I want to hear you tell me that we have to do it.

VINCE

We'll have to monitor the situation. If one of these unknown bulbs burns...

BETTY

We'll do that, Vince. We'll monitor the situation. We'll take charge of this situation and see it through. We have to.

VINCE

We have to. *(He comes back to his chair.)* In that case, I need something, Betty. I need something from you.

BETTY

Of course, Vince, anything. You know that.

VINCE

I need for you to read to me again.

BETTY

Sure, Vince. Of course I'll read to you. Of course I'll read to you.

*(She picks up the paper, folds it into her lap, and follows the clues with her pencil as she reads.)*

Across. "Urbane." Twelve letters.

Across. "Errand boy." Seven letters.

Down. "Early tome." Eleven letters.

Across. "Snickering canine." Five letters.

Down. "Final stroke." Three words: four, two and five letters.

*(And as she reads, we have...)*

*Blackout*