

*Hello, and welcome to Death Bites by Makena Metz, directed by Gwynn MacDonald. My name is Kerry McMenamin, and I will be reading Stage Directions, and providing pre-show Audio Description notes. I have blonde, shoulder-length straight hair, and am wearing a purple collarless blouse. My head and shoulders are visible, and I am in front of a green screen. The Stage Directions during the Reading have been revised to provide visual information for blind and low vision audiences.*

*This Virtual Play Reading is a collaboration between Queens Theatre, and Lincoln Center's ADA 30 Celebration.*

*For those of you unfamiliar with Play Readings, here are a few things to keep in mind as you watch Death Bites. Public Play Readings are an important tool in new play development. Before a new work is fully produced or published, playwrights have the opportunity to hear their play read by actors, guided by a director, in front of an Audience. The actors are not asked to memorized their lines, as the dialogue is often changed during rehearsals, as the playwright listens and makes adjustments. Also, Play Readings are not fully produced, and are usually presented without sets, lighting or costumes. The Actors place their scripts on music stands in front of them. This approach allows Audiences to use their imaginations, and conjure up the world of the play in their heads.*

*Now, during the pandemic, many theatres are presenting Virtual Play Readings. The biggest difference from public Play Readings is that the Actors and the Audience are not in a shared space. Each is in their own private space. So while Virtual Play Readings require an additional imaginative leap on the part of the Audience, they can also achieve an intimacy that would be harder to access in a traditional Theatre Space.*

*In today's Reading, the role of Amy is played by Ali Hardy. She has a round face, and dark hair pulled up on her head. She is wearing a white patterned hospital gown. Her head and shoulders are seen against a blue background. She remains still throughout most of the play, and rarely moves her arms.*

*Dracula is played by Johnny Link. He has short, dark hair and a thin face, and is wearing a long-sleeved black turtleneck and headphones. He gestures with his arms and hands throughout the Reading, sometimes moving away from the camera, and at other times, moving closer to it. He appears in front of a solid white background.*

*The cool midnight air stirs the blue privacy curtain dividing the hospital room from the room's door. 21-year-old Amy's clothing, blankets, stuffed animals, and games are strewn about the room. Flowers in vases adorn the window ledge with "get better soon" and "thinking of you" cards and balloons.*

*A man – a shadowy figure - looms over Amy, who sits upright in her hospital bed. Next to her is her dinner on a rolling tray. She's connected to a heart monitor which weakly beeps as they engage in a silent battle.*

*Beep... Beep... Beep... Beep...Beep.*

AMY

No.

DRACULA

No?! But you are almost dead, are you not? Just a little bite!

AMY

Get out of my room before I call my nurse!

DRACULA

Amy, of all the nurses have been hypnotized! They will not hear you.

AMY

Go lurk in another den of shadows!

*Amy weakly throws her juice box at him. She misses.*

DRACULA

Den of shadows?! Do I look like I lurk in den like bear?

*Amy arms herself with various condiments and Jellos, readying herself for battle.*

AMY

Blood sucking leech! Just let me die in peace!

*AMY throws things at him.*

DRACULA

I'll only - ow, drink- ow, a little- ow! Ow! Stop that! I use echolocation! You're literally blinding me!

AMY

You're not going to drink my blood, child of the night!

DRACULA

But you are dying!

AMY

I know I'm dying! It's all anybody talks about.

DRACULA

Then what's the harm in letting me have little taste, hmm?

AMY

It's all I have left.

DRACULA

I know you're close to death. Don't you want to help poor, starving vampire have teeny tiny snack? You die anyway and I go on my merry way, never to be seen again.

AMY

Do you have to ask permission? You can't just kill me? But wait, you crossed the threshold...

DRACULA

No, I can enter your room like anyone else. The room is an extension of the hospital, therefore its whole interior is permissible – why am I explaining this to you?! I *just* like to ask dying people if it's okay to suck blood. I'm not only vampire who prefers meals to be dying already...helps with feeling, ah- guilty. Usually people say yes, they want me to drain them so they die faster. Is just part of my job, feeding myself to save world.

AMY

Saving who? You're a murderer! Get out of my room or I *will* start throwing things again. Wait, are your fangs even real?

DRACULA

I just saw dentist, don't look at them, their glow will blind you.

AMY

O-kay?

DRACULA

Amy, I am confused. I am vampire, like you say. Garlic hating and all. I am offering you chance at good death. Better than this current death. You know your blood is almost kaput, gone. You have days left, maybe hours. I'm hungry and has been long century. Let me help you.

AMY

I don't need your help - I'm just weak.

DRACULA

You're basically falling over, here's a chair. Jeez.

AMY

I know my body isn't working. I can barely catch my breath it's working so bad. Side effect of no blood in my body. 2 in a million people have this disease and of course they couldn't find a bone marrow match for me. Instead, I got steroids and some medicine and guess what? It wasn't enough. My body just doesn't want to produce cells...I wanted to go on adventures, see the world. Maybe travel to Asia, or Australia, or Europe. Backpack through countries, taking the train everywhere. And then one day I meet a guy in a hostel in Paris and we dance on the seine while we drink champagne, and we laugh at the tourists hoping for directions from the locals and then we fall in love and buy a house outside the city and raise three kids – Emma, Jasper, and Pierre, and then we retire on a farm in lavender country and milk goats and make soap and, and now that possibility is just, gone! My life has been hospitals and mom and dad fighting over the bills, and trying to get my damn specialty medication from the pharmacy, and time is precious, and death's door is scary, scarier than vampires being real, but I don't know what happens when you die, so I want to be here for as long as possible and...

*Dracula is drowning in the torrent of her information.*

AMY

are you even paying attention?

DRACULA

Are you sure you're not part vampire already? Your hypnosis seems to work quite effectively.

AMY

Welp, I think we're done here. Go out, yep that's it, find another person to assuage your murderous guilt, just the way you came in, turn back into a bat, and off you go a happier, nay, *better* Dracula than before!

DRACULA

Oh my, I am very flattered but you have this wrong, I am not Dracula, not the Big D, oh no no no.

AMY

Well sorry for the mix up, okay, bye!

DRACULA

I am *A* Dracula. It's a very important distinction.

AMY

Yes, yes, and I Am Groot, We Are Groot, We are all Dracula-

DRACULA

Yes, exactly! We say, the plural of A Dracula is Dracula. We are all, Dracula. Like Moose.

AMY

So, let me get this straight, every single vampire in the world, is named Dracula?

DRACULA

Yes! Well, at first! It is tradition to honor our first creator for oh, about the first 500 years. And everything we wear, from our devastating capes to our sharp teeth on display, to our glorious accents-

AMY

HA I knew it!

*Dracula crosses his hands over his chest in a proud gesture.*

DRACULA

It is an HONOR to have fake accent for 500 years! Ugh! I forgot how annoying tiny, little miserable humans could be!

AMY

HA! If the accent is fake, you probably are too! I bet the whole bat thing was just, like an illusion or something huh? Are you a street magician? Where's your partner? Putting on his turtleneck to perform tricks too? Or am I just bat-shit (ha bat), you're just a like, manifestation of my, like fear or something right? A hallucination from all the medication? Like I'm afraid of you. Well ya know what? I can kill you just as easily as you can kill me! It's not a stake but it'll do!

*She brandishes a knitting needle.*

DRACULA

Wow, a knitting needle, so scary. You cannot knit me! I am A Dracula! I am one of many and have been here for centuries, seen things you've never even dreamed of! I've watched the powers that be rise and fall, observed mysteries your fragile mind couldn't possibly handle! I've witnessed wonders and terrors and -

*AMY stares at him with awe.*

AMY

why are you looking at me like that?

AMY

You could turn me.

DRACULA

Er, what?

AMY

You could turn me into a vampire!

DRACULA

You want me to make you *vampire*? Undead? Drinks blood? Allergic to crosses and sunlight?

AMY

Absolutely!

DRACULA

No way! What about the murdering – the pillaging? What would your parents think?!

AMY

My parents have always encouraged me to follow my dreams! They'd want me to do this. I'd get a chance at a normal – well mostly normal – life! I can help give them the golden years they actually deserve by like, leaving them presents for the next 100 years or something, anyway I'll figure that out, and meanwhile I can finally go on an adventure! I won't be weak, or out of breath, or low on



my counts at all! I'd just be, you know, undead! (Is that politically correct?) You *said* you wanted to suck my blood.

DRACULA

Your parents would care about your body! If it just vanished, they would be miserable! My parents couldn't find my body and it tore them apart! They probably thought it vanished on a plague cart or was cut up and sold as exotic meat. It must have been *horrible*. They had no burial mound to attend to! No grave marker to commemorate my existence! You have no idea what watching that happen was like! Being a new vampire is terrible.

AMY

My parents deserve a life of their own, not one where all they do is take care of me. And who needs a tombstone when I could ask to be cremated! They could hold my urn every day and think about me! And I would be around to make sure they'd have a good life. Look, I'm already used to blood. It doesn't gross me out because of all the transfusions. I've been sick for years.

DRACULA

Yeah well, murdering people is its own kind of sickness. I understand where you're coming from, really, my life wasn't great before either. I mean, who wants to be a cartographer or tend sheep for a living? I just don't think this is the right path for you. Being a vampire is a curse. You'll *want* to hurt people. That urge takes years, if not decades to master. It can be a very sad, lonely life. Do you think I would want that for you?! Do you think I wanted that for me?!

AMY

I don't know what you've been through. And I'm sorry your parents had no closure, but I know mine would. But then...they would live. And I want to live, too.

DRACULA

Being a vampire isn't living.

AMY

It would be a new adventure. A new beginning. Isn't that what life's about? Second chances?

DRACULA

You are not becoming a vampire, end of discussion. I will go find new midnight snack. Know where the geriatric ward is?

*Dracula disappears as Amy stabs her arm with the sharp knitting needle and BLEEDS. She thrusts a bloody rag toward him.*

AMY

Smell that? Salty and rusty and delicious right?

*Dracula is drawn back into her room.*

AMY

My tasty, warm blood just look at it trickling out, juicy, red, right here for the taking. I promise it won't clot. But it will run out if you don't drink it, and then my death will be for nothing.

*The odor of fresh blood mesmerized him.*

DRACULA

No, no, no, I am better than these animal instincts.

AMY

Let me bite you. Is that how it works? Give me your arm.

DRACULA

Amy, I was changed against my will. How would you like to be force fed blood – to be internally drowning- while an *animal* is feeding from you? That's why I always give people a *choice* when they're dying. Either I kill them, painlessly, easily, or they die from their disease. Why would I want to do to anyone else what was done to me? Turn them from their normal lives. Their family. Their loved ones.

AMY

I understand that! You have a moral compass. I admire that. In fact, it's kind of cool you don't go around killing people every which way. But the process of dying is not *living*! There is a world outside these hospital walls and I want to see it!

*Dracula grabs Amy's wrist. His pupils dilate and his eyes start swirling red. The bloodlust almost takes him. He lets go, wiping his salivating mouth.*

DRACULA

I- I will try to change you, if your heart desires it. Think of this like blood transfusion. You need my blood to replace your blood. So you drink while I drink and all's good. At least I think so.

AMY

I'll try to be good at biting. I don't have much... experience...

DRACULA

It's okay, just take my arm. Now don't think I'm a *Twilight* vampire. You won't sparkle in the sunlight and shit.

*They sit together on the bed, holding each other's arms.*

AMY

Are you nervous?

DRACULA

This *is* my first time and all.

AMY

(Exasperated) Just bite me.

*Dracula bites Amy, and her blood sprays everywhere. They both disappear from view. Dracula drinks her blood in a feeding frenzy, like a shark finding prey. Amy's slowly losing consciousness, she is dying. With her remaining strength, she reaches for Dracula and they wrestle for control. Her heart monitor falls over. She finally lands a bite on his neck and takes a sip... Her heart monitor beeps frantically and then...*

*Amy flat lines.*

*Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.*

*Dracula drinks.*

*Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.*

*He drinks.*

*Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.*

*He drinks. Suddenly, Dracula reemerges. He pushes himself off of Amy, horrified at what he's done. He shakes her, wiping blood off himself.*

DRACULA

Hey. You okay? Amy? Amy?

*Amy sits up and the lights change from florescent blue to golden and warm, magical. Her hospital gown is gone, and she now wears a black dress and a black scarf. Her hair is down - long and flowing. She gets out of bed. Her fangs glow. She's standing tall and strong and not the least bit tired or out of breath.*

DRACULA (cont.)

Whew. It worked!

AMY

What, you thought it wouldn't work?

DRACULA

Um, well, it's just a delicate process-

AMY

Hey, your voice is, normal.

DRACULA

Fuck.

NO it's not! I mean, yes, it is! Completely normal accent!

*Amy pulls the cords to the heart monitor off of her chest and accidentally whips the machine forward, crashing it into the wall.*

AMY

Oh, shoot.

*Dracula sets the monitor upright.*

DRACULA

We'll practice. You'll get used to being strong. We got to go, someone probably heard that.

AMY

This is amazing!

DRACULA

You're strong enough to make the world a better place. This is now your sacred mission – your job.

AMY

We're career Dracula? Shit.

DRACULA

Saving the world is our job description. The Dracula protect the environment. Got to make sure the humans don't start hunting mermaids or harvesting magic beans again.

AMY

No freaking way!

DRACULA

Way.

AMY

No need to be condescending.

DRACULA

Are you ready? Change into bat and leave shit hospital? Shit life?

AMY

It wasn't shit ... it was, just, hard. I was so tired all the time that it was difficult to do anything. But I guess shit happens and we reset our expectations. So if being a vampire is my new disease, then call me sick.

DRACULA

Whether a disease or sucking people's blood, it shouldn't hold you back from experiencing life. We have to make do with the cards we've been dealt.

*Dracula opens the hospital window, punching out the screen and letting in the cold night air.*

AMY

Where are we going?

DRACULA

Where do you want to go? The possibilities are endless.

AMY

Take me... on an adventure.

DRACULA

You're already on it.

END OF PLAY