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A Vampire Story

by

Moira Buffini



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A Vampire Story was written for the National Theatre's Connections programme 2008. It has been performed by schools and youth theatres all over the world.

Other plays by Moira Buffini published by Samuel French Ltd

Loveplay
Welcome to Thebes

Moira Buffini's plays include *Blavatsky's Tower* (Machine Room), *Gabriel* (Soho Theatre), *Silence* (Birmingham Rep), *Loveplay* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *Dinner* (National Theatre and West End), *Dying for It*, adapted from *The Suicide* by Nikolai Erdman (Almeida), *A Vampire Story* (NT Connections), *Marianne Dreams* (Almeida), *Welcome to Thebes* (National Theatre), *Handbagged* (Tricycle Theatre) and *wonder.land*, created with Damon Albarn and Rufus Norris (National Theatre).

CHARACTERS

ELLA / **ELEANOR –** a girl

CLAIRE / **CLARA –** a young woman

FRANK – a boy

BRIGGS / **MOON –** schoolboys, present day

DEBIT / **POINT –** schoolgirls, present day

MINT – a drama teacher
FILLET – a food technology teacher

MARIANNE – a child prostitute
RUTHVEN – a gambler
DARVELL – a stranger

TINA – Frank's mother
GEOFF – Frank's father

LETTY / **HARRIET –** schoolgirls, 19th century
BETTINE – a maidservant

MINT and **FILLET –** can be played by male or female actors.

SETTING

A town, somewhere in Britain. Present day.

SCENE

1. A Train
2. Drama A level
3. Food Technology
4. Happy Hour
5. Coursework
6. Frank's Party
7. Car Park
8. Costume Cupboard
9. Education
10. The Beast
11. Deathbed
12. Immortal
13. Byzantium

SCENE 1

ELEANOR *is sixteen. She is dressed in a costume of 1822. She is on stage almost all the time. There is a small writing desk where she occasionally sits and writes, although her focus should always be on the action.*

ELEANOR People will always believe the most fabulous tale you can tell. It's the one that they secretly long for. It must be unprovable, impossible, fantastical. To believe it then it becomes an act of faith. An act of faith.

ELLA Scene one. A train.

ELLA *and* **CLAIRE** *are dressed in modern day clothes.* **ELLA** *is sixteen,* **CLAIRE***, twenty one.* **CLAIRE** *is very fashionably and stylishly attired.* **ELLA** *dresses as if the whole concept of fashion is confusing and alien to her.*

CLAIRE Guess what your name is

ELLA I can't

CLAIRE Go on

ELLA Just tell me

CLAIRE You'll never guess

ELLA Don't make me

CLAIRE It's fun

ELLA No

CLAIRE Come on, it's interesting

ELLA No

CLAIRE I'll give you a clue. My name's Claire

ELLA Claire what?

CLAIRE Wythenshawe

ELLA Claire Wythenshawe

CLAIRE And you're my little sister. Eleanor

ELLA Oh

CLAIRE Isn't that great? I thought you'd be pleased with that

ELLA Eleanor Wythenshawe

CLAIRE That's right. And I'm Claire

ELLA You found two sisters called Eleanor and Claire?

CLAIRE Fancy that

ELLA What happened to them?

CLAIRE Killed in a car crash. Identities there for the taking

ELLA What about their parents?

CLAIRE They only had a dad. And I'm afraid he recently died

ELLA How?

CLAIRE *blandly shrugs.*

Don't you feel anything?

CLAIRE Like what?

ELLA For them

CLAIRE I feel glad we got away. You didn't think we would, did you?

ELLA One day, we won't

Pause.

So where are we going, Claire?

CLAIRE A lovely smalltown

ELLA I told you; no more smalltowns

CLAIRE They're the best places

ELLA They're a nightmare

CLAIRE We're going to a lovely smalltown surrounded by beautiful countryside

ELLA I'll be sick

CLAIRE No you won't

ELLA I'll go mad

CLAIRE You always say that

ELLA I'll kill myself

CLAIRE You could try.

ELLA I could kill you

CLAIRE Then you'd be all alone. I love these smalltowns, Ella. The people are lovely.

ELLA So gullible

CLAIRE I've rented us a nice little flat and I'll get a job in a bar or something

ELLA You're a very sad person

CLAIRE I thought you had doubts as to whether I was a person at all. *(she looks out of the window)* Look at those lovely little gardens. The way the sun dapples the patios. They've planted magnolias in the multiplex car park – and look at the bins; they're rainforest green. I'm going to love this place. It's going to be good for us here, I can feel it

ELLA You said that about the last place

CLAIRE That town we just left? I've already forgotten it

ELLA So what am I going to do in this dump?

CLAIRE There are two schools –

ELLA Not school again!

CLAIRE What else can I do with you? You refuse to grow up; you won't behave like an adult –

ELLA I feel ancient

CLAIRE Well the effect is utterly teenage. You don't know how lucky you are to be at school; all that knowledge you've got, all that education. One day, Ella, you'll put it all together and you'll calculate the most important thing. How to survive

ELLA Fine. School then

CLAIRE Don't do English Literature again. It makes you depressed. What about computing?

ELLA Done it

CLAIRE Music then

ELLA No thanks

CLAIRE Art

ELLA Done it

CLAIRE Or that subject where you make benches

ELLA That is not a subject

CLAIRE Can you do espionage at A Level?

ELLA No

CLAIRE What about cooking?

ELLA You mean food technology?

CLAIRE About time you learnt to cook

ELLA What's the point?

CLAIRE Ella, you don't have to eat all the stuff. Do it for me

ELLA Food technology

CLAIRE And what else is there? A nice, light subject. You could do with a laugh… I know!

ELLA I won't do it

CLAIRE What's wrong with you?

ELLA You can't make me

CLAIRE I haven't even said / what it is yet

ELLA I know what you're going to say. And how can I do that? It's all about laying yourself open to vicious attack, exposing your soul, performing like a flea in a / flea circus

CLAIRE Oh come on. What subject can be so terrible?

SCENE 2

ELEANOR Scene Two

FRANK A level Drama

> **FRANK** *has sensitive eyes and a nervous demeanour.* **MINT** *is full of fervour and frustration.* **MINT***'s students* **BRIGGS, POINT, DEBIT** *and* **MOON** *have perfected an air of cultivated boredom. They look as if they haven't had any fresh air in years. They look in fact, like detached, fashionable, effortlessly nonchalant vampires.*

MINT So, same old spoilt rebels and fashion victims as last year. Not allowed to swear with disappointment or I would. Briggs

BRIGGS Mint.

MINT I'm gutted to see you; I thought you'd be shovelling fries for the rest of your life. And Debit

DEBIT Hello Mint

MINT You actually passed an exam then?

DEBIT Might have

MINT So there's a brain somewhere under all that hairspray

DEBIT It's mousse

MINT Well, let's see how long you last

POINT No Mint, why don't we see how long you last?

MINT Well, we're off to a great start already. Now, I'm more than delighted to see that we have some new blood. What are your names?

ELLA Eleanor Wythenshawe

MINT And?

FRANK Frank Adam Stein

MINT OK, Ella and – one name will do – Frank. I'm going to throw you in at the deep end. Come on! First rule of making drama?

DEBIT Just say 'yes'

MINT Thank you, Debit. 'Yes'. Yes to an idea, yes to each other, yes to the energy, to the communal experience, yes to the mighty, universal 'yes'. That's what we aspire to in this class, isn't it?

MOON No

MINT So. The hot-seat. Frank; let's start with you

FRANK What?

MINT *takes* **FRANK** *to a seat apart from the group.*

MINT We're going to put you on the hot-seat

FRANK What for? Why?

BRIGGS To scald your arse

MINT The hot-seat, guys, is a place of discovery, OK? Now we usually use it when we're "in character", but I don't believe in having things all mapped out. So, I'm going to do something we've never tried before. I'm an instinctive teacher and my instincts are saying 'Go, Mint, go.' So I'm going to throw away the code of good practice and hot-seat you as yourself

MOON That's psychological torture, Mint

MINT It's going to be fun, OK?

MOON You could leave him permanently scarred

MINT Frank, the rest of the group will ask you questions –

MOON You're infringing his human rights

MINT And your only job is to be truthful

MOON These are torture chamber conditions

MINT Oh that is ridiculous! It's a simple question and answer exercise. Are you being tortured, Frank?

FRANK Um

MINT Now, think about everything that has bought you to this moment in time. People, when I clap my hands we're going to begin – so have your questions for Frank ready

FRANK *is full of dread.* **MINT** *claps.*

MOON Do you feel that in doing this, Mint is infringing your human rights?

FRANK Um

BRIGGS What's your name?

FRANK I've already said it

BRIGGS I didn't listen

FRANK Frank

BRIGGS Frank what?

FRANK Stein

BRIGGS What's that short for?

FRANK Franklin

MOON Your name's Franklinstein?

BRIGGS *(laughing)* Are you lying?

FRANK My dad thought it was funny too. In fact, it was his last big joke before his sense of humour calcified and had to be removed

POINT Are you a monster?

FRANK Probably

BRIGGS Are you a wanker?

MINT Briggs!

DEBIT What school were you at before, Franklin?

FRANK I'm home educated

DEBIT What?

FRANK My mum and dad have been teaching me at home

BRIGGS How long for?

FRANK Since I was a foetus

MOON You've never been to school?

FRANK No

POINT Why not?

FRANK Well you'll have to ask my parents that really

POINT No thanks

FRANK Perhaps they were worried that I might turn out normal if I went to school so they decided to concentrate all their efforts on turning me into a freak

POINT Why?

FRANK Well, they're freaks, so I expect they just wanted me to fit in

MINT Frank, I can understand your defensiveness but just try to be open. Say yes.

FRANK Well to be fair on my mum and dad – that's Tina and Geoff – I think they had high hopes. They wanted me to fulfil my potential

POINT What potential is that, Franklin?

FRANK Well Tina and Geoff thought that if I learnt everything there is to know by the age of sixteen I might turn out to be a leader of men or a genius or something but I eventually had to point out the flaw in their plan and say 'Tina and Geoff, if you don't let me go to school and talk to some other people I'll end up in a nut house before I'm twenty' and to drive home my point I painted my bedroom black and drowned Tina's pot plants so, given that I've got four 'A's at A level already, they decided to let me come. They see it as a bit of a gap year I think

MOON Did you say you were a genius?

FRANK No, I'm a great disappointment

BRIGGS Are you gay?

MINT Question not allowed

MOON Is God a man or a woman?

FRANK Pardon?

MINT I think he means are you religious?

MOON No, I mean is God a man or a woman?

FRANK Um, if there was a deity or creator I'd say it would be unlikely to have recognisable genitalia, so it would be hard to tell

DEBIT That's rude

FRANK God probably transcends gender. The deity is probably asexual or even polysexual

POINT Is that what you are, Frank?

FRANK It may even be formless, without substance or indeed, dare I say it, non existent and therefore imaginable in any form

DEBIT I think you're shy about sex

FRANK Is that a question?

DEBIT That's cute

You got any diseases?

MINT Not allowed

DEBIT Have you got a girlfriend, Frank?

FRANK No

BRIGGS Have you got any friends at all?

FRANK Yes, no, well it depends what you mean by friends. If you mean actual living people who like me, then no

DEBIT That's a bit sad isn't it?

FRANK Well I used to have an imaginary friend but he moved out. He was great; really funny; much more daring than me. He used to subvert Geoff's quizzes and put lighted matches in the bin but in the end he had to go

MOON Why?

FRANK It turned out he was hiding pornography under the bed and Tina found it. She had a massive row with him and he came in to tell me he was leaving and I haven't seen him since

ELLA Do you miss him?

FRANK Yes

DEBIT So what d'you do for fun, Frank?

FRANK Fun?

MOON Apart from the pornography

FRANK That wasn't mine. It was imaginary

MINT One last question: what made you choose Drama, Frank?

FRANK Um, my parents think it's a totally useless subject so it seemed like the obvious choice

MINT OK. Well done. Respect. Round of applause

Only **MINT** *and* **ELLA** *clap.*

BRIGGS Frank

FRANK Yes?

BRIGGS I love you

FRANK *flinches as if he's about to be hit.*

MINT Eleanor, we're going to do something different with you, OK We're going to play "Lifegame". Are you ready?

ELLA No

MINT Learn to say yes. OK you barbarians, get off your chairs. Eleanor, I'm going be "in role" as the interviewer. I'm going to try to find out who you are. *(to the rest of the group)* And from what I glean in the interview, you lot are going to act out episodes in Ella's life

POINT Bore me to death

MINT Someone's already beaten me to it, Point. Move these chairs

ELLA *and* **FRANK** *move their chairs.*

ELLA That was brave

FRANK No it wasn't

ELLA I've never told the truth about myself

FRANK Why not?

ELLA Because no one would believe it

MINT I said move your chairs

The others move their chairs.

FRANK I would

ELLA *looks at him.* **ELEANOR** *joins him. Remains close by.*

MINT Right. Welcome to "Lifegame". Today we have as our special guest Eleanor Wythenshawe

MOON *(without enthusiasm)* Yo

MINT And we're going to be recreating before her very own eyes, episodes from her true life story. Eleanor, let's take a journey back to your early childhood. Can you share with us one of your earliest memories?

ELEANOR Yes.

ELLA I'm at Miss Skullpepper's school. It's a rainy night. I'm about six years old and I'm in bed with two of my friends

POINT What sort of a school was this?

ELLA It was a private orphanage. We all had benefactors who paid our fees. Most of us didn't know who they were. It's hard to describe really; such places don't exist any more.

MINT When was this?

ELLA/ELEANOR Must have been about 1812

MINT Eleanor, I think I can feel some improvising going on here, which, in a different exercise would be totally cool but as this game's about the "Real You", just stick to the truth for now, OK?

ELLA I'll try

MINT So, take us back to your childhood

ELLA I have a clear memory of celebrating the rout of Napoleon in Russia, that's why I'm so sure it was 1812. It was night

BRIGGS What were you doing in bed with two girls?

ELLA Space was short and in winter the house was so cold

BRIGGS Were you naked?

ELLA No

DEBIT What were your friends called?

ELLA Harriet and Leticia

MINT OK, in the spirit of saying yes, we're going to go along with Ella's impro

ELLA It's not an impro; it's a memory

MINT Point, you play Eleanor, Debit, you play Harriet and Briggs, you're Leticia

BRIGGS No way

MINT I beg your pardon?

BRIGGS I'm not playing a girl

MINT Get over it, or get out. You're three in a bed

BRIGGS Tell me about my character

ELLA Well, Leticia was very shy and sweet

BRIGGS Was she buff?

ELLA Pardon?

BRIGGS 'Cause I'm not playing a dog

ELLA She was dark and slight. I thought her beautiful. Her mother had died on her way home from the Gold Coast, after giving birth to her child of shame

BRIGGS Her what?

ELLA Leticia was a child of shame. We all were. Harriet was the daughter of a tea merchant. Her mother was a whore, like mine

DEBIT Did you just say my mother was a whore?

MINT Eleanor, this certainly shows you've done some very interesting reading

MOON If this was 1812, how come you've not decomposed?

ELLA/ELEANOR I freely confess that I have stayed alive for all these years by drinking human blood

This causes a sensation; from shock to laughter.

MOON Yuk

POINT Oh my god

BRIGGS That's disgusting

DEBIT You fucking weirdo

MINT Language!

POINT That is so freaked out

MOON Are you saying you're a vampire?

ELLA Yes

MINT Eleanor, you know sometimes, when we've gone through a traumatic event, maybe bereavement or parental divorce, we retreat into fantasy to try to make sense of it all. Now, I don't think that's wrong. You've found a sympathetic ear here, / OK?

DEBIT No she hasn't

POINT Is this supposed to be a drama lesson? Because this is like stepping into someone's nervous breakdown, Mint

MINT Let's have a tableau

MOON A tableau of what?

MINT Of Eleanor's story. She's at school, in bed with her friends, Leticia and Harriet

MOON What about me?

MINT You're the bed

They form a tableau. **POINT***, as a vampire, is trying to suck* **BRIGGS***'s blood.* **BRIGGS** *swoons, girlishly.* **DEBIT** *does Munch's "scream".* **MOON** *attention-seeks as the bed.*

Eleanor, is that how it was?

ELLA No. We were six years old. They were asleep

MINT You two; you're asleep. You're six years old.

BRIGGS What is the point of being asleep? Are we supposed to learn something, being asleep?

MINT I ask myself that question every time you enter this Studio

POINT We've spent enough time on this freakish shit

MINT Language! Eleanor, you've got a great imagination – and that's a vital tool for making effective theatre. Now, I don't want to finish yet, OK? I don't want you to walk out of here feeling that you've failed

ELLA I won't

MINT I want you to leave this studio with your head held high, OK?

ELLA I will

MINT Let's fast forward to the present, to the twenty first century here and now and find out about the real Eleanor

DEBIT How many people have you drunk?

BRIGGS Do you suck anything else apart from blood?

MINT Who do you live with, Eleanor?

ELLA Claire

FRANK Who's Claire?

ELLA She's my legal guardian

DEBIT What about your mum and dad?

ELLA My father was a sperm. I never knew him

MINT And your mum?

ELLA/ELEANOR My mother is a vampire

POINT She is a mental emergency, Mint

MINT OK, thank you Eleanor. One final question: what made you choose drama?

ELLA *giggles at their consternation.*

ELLA My hilarious sense of fun

FILLET Scene three

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