

Acting Edition

Bite Me

by Eliana Pipes

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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BITE ME was first produced by WP Theater (Producing Artistic Director, Lisa McNulty; Managing Director, Michael Sag) and Colt Coeur (Founding Artistic Director, Adrienne Campbell-Holt; Executive Producer, Heather Cohn) on September 22nd, 2023. The production was directed by Rebecca Martínez with scenic design by Chika Shimizu, costume design by Sarita Fellows, lighting design by Lucrecia Briceno, sound design by Tosin Olufolabi, and hair design by Ashley Wise. Fight and intimacy direction was by Judi Lewis-Ockler. The Production Stage Manager was Caren Celine Morris. The Assistant Stage Manager was Siobhan Petersen. The Prop Supervisor was Addison Heeren. The cast was as follows:

MELODY Malika Samuel
NATHAN David Garelik

BITE ME was originally workshopped and developed in the 2022 Pacific Playwrights Festival as part of The Lab at South Coast Repertory.

CHARACTERS

MELODY – Sixteen, Black, woman – Smart and outspoken (but never at the cost of being polite), a “good kid.” Straight A’s, a member of every student organization. She has a very organized backpack. Deeply isolated.

This high school is not in her district. She lives in a city closer to downtown than to the suburbs and makes a long commute by bus each morning and night. She sells homework to other kids under-the-table. Lately she’s been crying through lunch.

MELODY – At twenty-seven in Act Two – Cold, self-protective, sharp-witted. Melody has become a confident and successful career woman, although navigating an elite university and the corporate world has hardened her spirit. She comes into the closet to flaunt her success, and to prove to herself that she’s grown beyond the person she used to be in high school.

NATHAN – Sixteen, white, man – Charmingly arrogant and daring, a “bad kid.” He can be perceptive, thoughtful, and kind, but he makes a point of doing it sparingly and only for people who’ve “earned” it. He has burgeoning alcoholism born from opportunity and angst. He comes from money but steals for sport.

NATHAN – At twenty-seven in Act Two – Warm, soft-spoken, unassuming. In the years after high school, Nathan hit rock bottom and undertook a humbling journey through substance abuse to recovery in a 12-Step Program. He thinks of Melody fondly and comes into the closet to make amends and to reconnect.

SETTING

A storage closet with a blue door at a suburban public high school in a “good” district.

This is a catch-all space at the school: theater costumes mingle with off-season sports gear and broken desks. Large wire racks hold boxes of junk. There’s a dented metal table, and a rolling cart stacked with fold-up chairs.

TIME

Act One takes place in 2004.

Act Two takes place in 2015.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Whenever possible, the play should be performed without an intermission.

A large asterisk in dialogue (*) indicates that the character is coughing or sneezing.

A forward slash (/) in dialogue indicates that the text immediately following is interrupted by another character's text in overlapping dialogue

*For our younger selves
who carried us forward
and walk with us still*

ACT ONE

Scene One

(The sound of a key turning in a lock –)

*(**MELODY** enters quickly and covertly. This is not her first time in the space, but she takes it in.)*

(She unstacks one of the folding chairs and sets it up at the metal table. She unzips her very organized backpack and takes out her lunch, something modest but healthy. She gets three bites in and stops herself cold. Then –)

(She starts crying, hard. It's weird and sad and endearing.)

(She attempts one more bite, then puts the food down altogether and indulges in the weeping. It almost seems like she's putting on a performance of crying, for herself.)

*(Suddenly – the lock starts to jiggle. **MELODY** freezes.)*

(She jumps to her feet and scans the room. She picks up a baseball bat instinctively for safety as a comfort object. She looks for a hiding spot, but just then –)

*(The door swings open and **NATHAN** is in the doorway, holding something rectangular under his shirt.)*

NATHAN. Melody?

MELODY. Oh, hi Nathan! / Uh –

NATHAN. What are you doing here?

MELODY. Did you follow me?

NATHAN. Wh–, no –

MELODY. What's under your / jacket? –

NATHAN. *(Seeing her food.)* Is that your lunch?

MELODY. No!

*(The sound of footsteps approaching. **NATHAN** leans out to trace the sound, then panics. He's only halfway through the door.)*

NATHAN. Fuck – uh, can I come in? I'm trying to lose this guy –

MELODY. Yeah, yeah, whatever –

(She moves her bag out of the way to make space for him. In the process, she also slams the lid on her lunchbox closed and shoves it back into her backpack.)

(He scoots inside and closes the door behind him quietly. Then presses his ear to the door to listen and waits.)

(Nothing for a moment. Then, distantly, the creeeeeeek of a door opening. A few footsteps as someone surveys.)

*(**MELODY** edges closer to the door and cranes her neck to try to hear the sound. She moves closer to him.)*

(The door handle jiggles, someone on the other side trying to get in. They both catch their breath. Then, it stops.)

(The distant door closes, and the footsteps drift away.)

(Whispering.) Who was that?

(He turns. They're face-to-face, and both surprised to find their bodies suddenly so close.)

(They linger there for a second. Heat. Then –)

NATHAN. Were you crying?

MELODY. What? No! – Um, it's just like, dusty in here –

(MELODY breaks and makes distance between them. She realizes she still has the baseball bat in her hands.)

Oh, I guess I should put this back.

Unless you need it for – whoever's out there?

NATHAN. No, I think I'm good.

(A little amused.)

Were you gonna hit me with that?

MELODY. No! Or – yeah?

Sorry – I like, panicked a little. I've never seen anyone in here before.

What are you doing in here?

NATHAN. Nothing. What are you doing?

MELODY. Nothing.

(Neither one knows what to say. They look at each other.)

(MELODY's gaze lands on the object that NATHAN is hiding under his shirt. He shuffles his jacket to cover it.)

NATHAN. Uh –

MELODY. Oh! Do you – um.

Do you want to take your worksheets now?

NATHAN. Oh –

MELODY. I know this isn't our usual trade-off time or whatever.

But I have them. In my bag. If you want.

NATHAN. I mean, whatever's good –

MELODY. Cool, yeah, let's do now! Right? Yeah!

Since we're both here, nice and convenient.

(MELODY goes to her backpack.)

This is actually kinda lucky, I was running ahead of schedule this week. Usually I do them Thursday nights but I finished my English report early, which was a nice surprise. Or – it's whatever.

(While her back is turned, NATHAN focuses his attention on the thing under his shirt. He darts to one of the wire racks and uses his free hand to try to take down a specific box.)

NATHAN. Cool. Is it still ten?

(Meanwhile MELODY pulls a folder out of one of the many, many zipper compartments of her bag.)

MELODY. Actually it's fifteen now, because of the new like, little paragraph short answer thing that Mr. Hutchinson started adding. They just take a lot longer to do, and it's harder to reuse answers, and like – get my handwriting to look different.

NATHAN. Wait – you do different handwriting for every single one?

MELODY. Well, yeah of course.

*(She turns around and locks eyes with
NATHAN as he's trying to maneuver the box.
He's caught.)*

What is that?

NATHAN. Nothing.

MELODY. Seriously?

(Beat. NATHAN reshuffles, seeming annoyed.)

NATHAN. Do you have a – like a *reason* that you're in here?

MELODY. Oh – I just got the keys! I'm – um. Well it's complicated –

I'm on student council as the secretary and Kelly White used to be treasurer but she got walking pneumonia on her ski trip over winter break and so now I'm secretary *and* treasurer, and you get the key to this door so that you can get the lockbox down from storage for bake sales.

NATHAN. ...Okay.

So you're like *new*.

MELODY. New? To the room? Um. I guess.

NATHAN. It's just – I've kinda had this room for a while.

(MELODY stands her ground.)

MELODY. Are you trying to like? – kick me out / right now?

NATHAN. No! But, I'm just saying, I do kinda have like a *stake* in this room.

We go way back, this room and me – like it's kinda *my* room.

MELODY. That's so funny, because *I* have the keys.

NATHAN. (*Accepting.*) Fair enough.

(*Beat.*)

MELODY. You can just tell me what you're doing, you know?

Like, it's cool.

I'm not gonna like tell the teacher on you, if that's what you're worried about –

NATHAN. I didn't think you would –

(**MELODY** holds up the folder of plagiarized worksheets.)

MELODY. I mean that should be obvious, I'm not a freaking narc, okay?

NATHAN. Okay, okay! –

MELODY. Like – you're good, that's all I mean.

NATHAN. Alright.

MELODY. So. Just tell me.

What is that? Did you take it?

(**NATHAN** breaks into a devilish smile.)

NATHAN. It's uh – it's kind of funny actually.

(**NATHAN** lifts up his shirt to take the object out – and for a second, **MELODY** sees a flash of his bare chest.)

(*He produces a huge framed glamour photo of a corgi, and a small generic award plaque. **MELODY** recognizes both objects immediately and rushes to them.*)

MELODY. No freaking WAY!!! Is this from the counselor's office?!? –

NATHAN. Yeah, this is Caputo's stupid little dog. Doesn't it look just like her? –

MELODY. Oh my god – a prize for “administrative excellence”? –

NATHAN. Yeah, she did an excellent job lecturing me –

MELODY. Wait, how did you even get this off the *wall*? –

NATHAN. Honestly? It's easier than you'd think. Nobody pays any fucking attention.

MELODY. Except for the guy that chased you here?

NATHAN. Yeah, except for him.

(Beat. MELODY thinks.)

MELODY. But – why'd you bring it all here?

NATHAN. Well. I uh – I have a little *collection*.

MELODY. Can I see it?

NATHAN. You want to?

MELODY. I mean, yeah.

(Beat. He sizes her up.)

NATHAN. Why were you crying?

MELODY. *(Firmly.)* I told you, I wasn't.

(NATHAN points to her streaking makeup.)

NATHAN. You have little like – lines, going on –

MELODY. Dammit!

(MELODY turns and rubs under her eyes. She goes to her backpack and searches through the compartments until she finds a small compact. She checks herself in it.)

NATHAN. So? I answered *your* question, didn't I?

MELODY. You did.

(MELODY sighs, she's not entirely out of the woods of this crying session.)

It's stupid, I'm being stupid.

I just um. I heard some people talking shit about me and it got under my skin. That's all.

NATHAN. Who?

MELODY. That's two questions.

NATHAN. Just tell me.

MELODY. ...Jenny Wingate. And her stupid little posse – Tara and Celeste.

They do it, every week. Like, they'll talk shit about me while I'm in earshot.

And I know they do it just to get to me but it still does, like. Get to me.

(MELODY tears up again. She tilts her head back to stop her makeup from running and fans her eyes.)

Sorry – this is so fucking embarrassing –

NATHAN. You need a cigarette.

MELODY. *(Laughing.)* I probably do.

(NATHAN swings his backpack off his shoulder and takes out a pack of cigarettes.

MELODY stops cold.)

Oh.

NATHAN. What?

MELODY. I just didn't think you like – had any.

NATHAN. Always.

(He opens the pack and takes out two cigarettes.)

MELODY. How do you get them?

NATHAN. My brother picks them up for me, his ID says twenty-four.

Here, take it – it'll cool you down.

(He tucks one between his lips and holds another one out to her. She looks at it like it's a snake.)

(Her eyes dart up to the ceiling.)

MELODY. Um –

NATHAN. There aren't any smoke detectors if that's what you're looking for. I smoke in here all the time, I'm surprised you didn't smell it.

MELODY. I have kind of a bad nose.

NATHAN. You ever smoked before?

MELODY. *(Lying.)* Yeah!

NATHAN. Well, I'm not gonna tell on you either, if that's what you're worried about.

MELODY. I'm not worried.

NATHAN. No pressure or whatever, but like. It'll help.

(MELODY considers, then reaches for the cigarette. Then she stops herself.)

MELODY. I don't think I could do a whole one by myself.

(He flashes her a smile, then puts the cigarette he'd offered her back into the pack. He takes the cigarette out of his mouth and hands that one to her instead.)

NATHAN. I'll finish it for you.

(She takes it from him, very conscious that it just came out of his mouth. She puts it to her lips. He hands her the lighter, and she tries unsuccessfully to spark it.)

MELODY. *(To herself, frustrated.)* I think it's sticking –

NATHAN. I got it –

(NATHAN steps in close to her. Heat.)

(He takes the lighter and sparks it, using his other hand to cup the flame – even though there's no trace of a breeze in the still, silent room.)

Okay, hold it up –

(She does. He lights the cigarette.)

Now inhale.

(She does. He looks at the flame, she looks at him.)

Now out.

(She exhales smoothly, using every molecule of her focus to keep herself from coughing. She produces a small puff of smoke. He's a little impressed.)

Not bad.

(Now that she's passed his test – NATHAN goes back to the shelf and takes down the cardboard box he was reaching towards earlier. MELODY is a little proud of herself.)

Anyway, Jenny Wingate is a fucking poser – I hate that bucktooth bitch.

MELODY. HA! Yeah – she IS a bucktooth – ...

(She can't bring herself to say "bitch.")

Yeah! I hate her too!

(NATHAN sets the box down on the ground.)

NATHAN. There it is. My collection.

(MELODY moves to look at the box, amazed.)

MELODY. Wow – this is...this is like...

NATHAN. *(Pointing to the cigarette.)* It's still lit.

MELODY. Oh!

(She tries another puff and immediately starts coughing.)

(Coughs.) ***

NATHAN. You okay?

(She nods, but the cough is picking up. It's kind of intense.)

Yeah, that'll happen.

MELODY. I'm – ** I'm good **** I just need to – ***

(She passes him the cigarette and goes to her backpack. She fishes out her water bottle and drinks deeply.)

(He starts smoking effortlessly, taking long draws. He's clearly a smoker.)

NATHAN. I used to cough too.

It's no big deal, like. I get it.

MELODY. Thanks.

It did help a little – I think. Or.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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