

## ***A Night for Conversation***

One Act Play by Kade Mendelowitz

### Synopsis:

When Julia learns of a life-altering event, she decides it is time to confront her abusive husband.

### Characters:

**Julia** A wife. Not a sparkling beauty but a pretty though somewhat “average” looking woman – in decent shape, though. Thin / small.

**William** The husband. He should look either fairly average, or slightly large. Comfortable in a button-down shirt, though not extremely neat or pressed.

**Frank** An average looking guy, maybe slightly stocky. He should not be very big. He’s wearing a large coat – not as cheesy as a trench coat, but from the same vein.

### Preshow / Postshow music suggestions:

“Numb” Linkin’ Park

“Breaking the Habit” Linkin’ Park

### Setting:

The kitchen of a typical family household, Vermont, May 17th – a Thursday of the current year. Downstage right, along the stage right wall of a typical box set configuration is a refrigerator. Upstage left is a door (a swinging door could be fun) to the living/family room. Upstage wall has the sink. Upstage right, on the upstage wall, is a doorway that leads to the driveway. Down center (slightly stage left, perhaps) is a round kitchen table with three chairs. A light hangs over the table. There is also a light over the stove/counter area.

It’s late evening – the sun is setting. Julia is cleaning – alone in the kitchen. She takes a garbage bag and is about to leave through the back door when Frank comes in from that direction.

FRANK: Going somewhere?

JULIA: Oh, uh, hi. No, just taking out the garbage.

FRANK: I believe that can wait.

JULIA: Yes...um, of course it can. You are –

FRANK: You may call me Frank.

JULIA: I expected you to be bigger.

FRANK: That’s a common misconception.

JULIA: Sorry. I didn’t mean to offend.

FRANK: *Slightly amused* It takes a lot more than that to offend me.  
There’s a moment of awkward silence

JULIA: I’ve never hired anyone like you before. How does this work?

FRANK: Trying to make her laugh Well, I’ve never hired anyone like me before either.

JULIA: She chuckles

FRANK: It’s pretty simple, actually. From what I understand we have a little time?

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JULIA: Oh, not much. My husband, William, will be home at 8:30 sharp.

FRANK: I like a man who can keep a schedule.

JULIA: Well, William can. He's always on time – no matter what. On Thursday he bowls, then is home at precisely 8:30pm. He times everything to the last second. And he hates when people are late, then. That makes him really mad.

FRANK: People don't get mad. Dogs get mad. People get angry.

JULIA: You haven't met William then. He gets more than angry. He gets mad.

FRANK: Well, then, perhaps he's an animal.

JULIA: Is about to defend her husband, but she catches herself. Well, then, perhaps you're right.

FRANK: It's agreed then; good. Your pleasantness was getting to me. I was beginning to think I might have the wrong address.

JULIA: Oh, no. This is the right place.

Another awkward silence. Then she continues. . .he is heading towards the refrigerator...

JULIA: Would you like something to drink?

He shakes his head no.

FRANK: Indicating some artwork on the refrigerator, obviously done by a child. Is anyone else home?

JULIA: No. Joanna is at the sitter's next door. Would you care to sit down?

FRANK: I prefer to stand for now, thank you. I like to be ready for a situation.

JULIA: Yes, I suppose you would want that. May I ask you something?

FRANK: Sure. This is your dime.

JULIA: Why do you do this work?

FRANK: Well, I sorta fell into it you could say. And I'm good at it. And I like to help people.

JULIA: Help people?

FRANK: Yes, that's right. Help people. I assist with cleaning up sticky situations. The truth is, the ones that call me aren't bad people. Bad people don't have to call me. No, it's the good ones who need help – who feel trapped, usually. They're the ones that call me.

JULIA: Really?

FRANK: You sound surprised.

JULIA: I am, I guess. I would think the people that call the likes of you. . . realizing what she said, she tries to find other words to continue.

FRANK: Ma'am, the people that call me are the ones like you.

JULIA: Oh. I suppose they would be.

FRANK: I've heard many stories. Bad ones. Situations no one would want to find themselves in. And lost, too. I help a lot of people who seem to have lost their way. Only they haven't. They're just too close to see it. They haven't gotten lost at all. They were steered that way. Steered away from the nice life they deserve. Steered by someone they thought they could trust, usually.

JULIA: Whoa. Well, that does sound about right.

FRANK: People often put trust where it doesn't belong.

JULIA: That's a funny way of saying it. Trust doesn't get 'put' anywhere overnight though. It's strange what a person can get used to.

FRANK: Now may I ask you something?

JULIA: Looking down, not sure if she wants to share anything with him I guess that would be fair.

FRANK: Why do you want to be here?

JULIA: Excuse me?

FRANK: I've been doing this for a while now, and most people don't like to watch. Actually, you're the first one who does want to watch.

JULIA: Perhaps it's more personal with me.

FRANK: There have been some pretty personal situations I've walked in to. . .  
His watch beeps, which interrupts what he was saying.

FRANK: Continues Enough chit chat. It's almost time. Which way does your husband come in?

JULIA: Through this door (indicating the rear/kitchen door).

FRANK: Well, that's easy enough. Why don't you go into the living room?

JULIA: You know I want to be here.

FRANK: Why don't you wait for a few minutes, and I'll call you in when the excitement is over.

JULIA: Thinking, hesitating for a moment, No, I believe I'll stay right here.

FRANK: Well, go into the other room and turn on the light. And turn this one off.

JULIA: Excuse me?

FRANK: I want it dark in here. And you should at least appear to be in the next room. It makes it easier.

JULIA: Oh. All right. I understand. She turns off the light in the kitchen. There is a light outside the door that we can see spilling into the room, also some moonlight. Julia goes into the living room- and we can see that she's turned on a light, as it spills from under the swinging door. When she walks back into the kitchen, there are large streaks of light that cut through the room.

FRANK: He speaks, almost with a growl. Stop that.  
She stops the door from swinging. She stands next to the wall. We see William walking by the window, to the door – or hear a car pull up.

WILLIAM: As he enters the room I'm home!  
There is a flurry of excitement. We can barely see the men wrestling. Frank's coat is flailing about. We here scuffle sounds, and punching / skin being hit. William gets free for a moment, but is tripped and he grabs the refrigerator handle to stop himself from falling. The fridge door opens, and the light spills in to the room so we can see the end of the scuffle. Frank quickly gets on top of William and gives him two punches to the face. William is out. Julia is horrified, and we can hear her whimper. She is paralyzed against the wall, with a hand covering her mouth. The room is still dim as Frank puts William in the chair, center.

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Franks pulls a roll of tape out of his coat pocket and we can hear him pulling and ripping the tape as he bounds William to the chair. He works quickly and purposefully. Every move is precise and deliberate.

FRANK: What about his mouth?

JULIA: Taking a moment to compose herself enough to speak. Excuse me?

FRANK: His mouth. Do you want it covered?

JULIA: Um, no. I guess not.

FRANK: Well, let me know if you change your mind. He is finishing up. He stands straight and pushes his hair back. He goes over and closes the refrigerator door. He turns the light back on.

We see William is beaten up and bleeding slightly. His shirt is ripped, and he has a large bruise on his cheek. His arms are bound to the back of the chair behind his back. His legs are taped to the chair legs. There's also a strip of tape across his chest so he can't wriggle much. Frank appears just slightly sweaty – but otherwise no worse for the wear. His knuckles are red.

FRANK: Would you like to speak to him now, or do you need time to prepare?

JULIA: No. No, I'm ready. I've waited a long time for this.

Frank pulls out a small jar, unscrews it and waves it under Williams nose. William wakes up quickly, though he's having trouble focusing.

WILLIAM: What? What's going on here? Tries to get up, but find he can not. Julia? He's getting loud and angry. Why am I tied to this chair?

Julia is visibly afraid of William.

FRANK: Sitting down in the chair Stage Right – opposite side of the table of Julia. He's spun it around so the back is facing William. Technically you're not.

WILLIAM: What? Who the hell are you? I'm not what?

FRANK: Let's see here. . . my name Frank. I'm the one who kicked your ass. And technically you're not tied to that chair. You are taped to it.

WILLIAM: What the fu.. Frank hits him in the back of the head – which cuts William off from speaking.

FRANK: Rule number 1: watch your language. You're in the presence of a lady.

WILLIAM: A lady? Julia, what's going on here? Untie me.

Frank hits William in the back of the head again.

FRANK: I said you're not tied. You have a problem listening, William.

WILLIAM: Right. He takes a breath, tries to compose himself. Julia, darling, why am I taped to this chair?

JULIA: Because I want to talk to you.

WILLIAM: You can talk to me. You don't need to ti...tape me to a chair to talk to me.

JULIA: Speaking somewhat sheepishly. She is not very comfortable with this situation. Sometimes I feel like I might need to.

WILLIAM: Look, Julia, what's going on here? He's getting aggravated again, and begins trying to pull

himself free of the tape.

JULIA: Well, I...

WILLIAM: Angrily/loud Out with it!

FRANK: He turns William's head toward him sharply. Keep a civil tongue, Willie. Be respectful.

JULIA: Softly. He doesn't like to be called Willie.

FRANK: Oh, Willie and I are friends. You don't mind it when I call you 'Willie', do you?

WILLIAM: (Gritting his teeth slightly) No.

FRANK: See? I think we're starting to understand each other finally. Go ahead, ma'am. Say your piece.

WILLIAM: Yes, ma'am... why don't you say your piece?

JULIA: I don't like the way you treat me, William. I don't like the way you talk to me and Joanne.

WILLIAM: What do you mean, sugarlump? I love you and little Jo.

JULIA: I'm not sure that you do.

WILLIAM: Why, that's not fair. Why don't you let me go here, let me hug you and show you my love.

JULIA: Maybe you do love us, but you don't know what that really means. You don't know how to show love.

WILLIAM: That's a terrible thing to say.

JULIA: Well, it's true. And I don't like the way you...she hesitates

FRANK: Would you like me to leave the room?

WILLIAM: That would be great. Give us some privacy to talk.

JULIA: Don't do that. Don't tell him what to do. Don't leave... (she's visibly afraid of what would happen if Frank leaves)

FRANK: It's all right. He can't anyway; I won't listen to him.

JULIA: Good. Please stay.

WILLIAM: Sure, why don't you have a cup of coffee while you wait?

FRANK: Great. He gets up, fills a teapot of water, and puts it on the stove. Thank you for the offer, Willie. Though I prefer tea.

JULIA: Stop it! This isn't about coffee or tea.

WILLIAM: Well, what's it about then? Spit it out so we can finish this.

JULIA: I'm afraid. I'm afraid of you, William. But more than that, I'm afraid of what you'll do.

WILLIAM: Look, now...

JULIA: Almost as if she's lost elsewhere...I've been afraid of you for some time.

WILLIAM: You don't need to be.

JULIA: What happened to us, William? What happened to the way you used to hold me?

WILLIAM: What are you talking about? I hold you. I hold you all the time.

JULIA: You hold me back. You've stopped me from growing.

WILLIAM: That's crazy talk. I do no such thing.

JULIA: I use to create.

WILLIAM: Create? Create what?

JULIA: I used to paint. And collage...and scrapbook.

WILLIAM: Right – scrapbooking. And collage. Little pieces of paper getting everywhere.

JULIA: They did not.

WILLIAM: (To Frank now) She'd take up the whole kitchen – there'd be no room left on the table.

JULIA: But I...

WILLIAM: Little pieces of paper would be everywhere. And glue, and glitter. An' God forbid I'd want some dinner.

FRANK: God forbid.

WILLIAM: And what a racket I'd hear if I moved the stuff just a little!

JULIA: Just a little? You would shove it all off the table.

WILLIAM: The crying...you'd think the whole world was falling down!

JULIA: No, not the whole world. Just mine. Crashing to the floor.

WILLIAM: Don't be so dramatic.

JULIA: Why couldn't I just have some room for what I like?

WILLIAM: Some room? Fine. But then the pieces would track into the living room.

FRANK: And I bet it seemed to infect the whole house.

WILLIAM: Damn straight. Infest it like a swarm of termites. Termites and ants that I'd have to exterminate.

JULIA: Is that what your reaction was? To exterminate?

WILLIAM: It's just an expression.

JULIA: What kind of expression? Not one of love.

WILLIAM: Well, no. Not then. I had to stop it.

JULIA: Stop what? My creative outlet?

WILLIAM: No – the papers. And I wanted my dinner on the table. I work hard every day, get home at 6:03pm, and expect a warm dinner on the table. Is that so much to ask? For dinner to be ready?

JULIA: Doubting herself. Well, no.

WILLIAM: Right. So I taught you.

FRANK: Showed her the error of her ways, did you?

WILLIAM: I had to set her straight.

FRANK: Heavy breath. Hrmf. I bet she wasn't very straight after you were done with her.

WILLIAM: C'mon. It wasn't like that.

JULIA: It was like that. And then you chased all of my girlfriends away.

WILLIAM: What, those chatterboxes you'd have your \$5 coffee's with? Those women were not your friends.

JULIA: They were.

WILLIAM: They were trouble. Pause. Look, baby, if that's what this is about; fine. See your friends. You can hang out and talk with them all you want. You can even scrapbook with them.

JULIA: (Happy) That is what I want!

WILLIAM: (Kinglike) Then you should have it.

JULIA: And I need you, William.

WILLIAM: You've got me. You've got me taped to this chair.

JULIA: No, that's not what I mean. I need you. I need you to love me.

WILLIAM: I do love you.

JULIA: I need you to show me.

WILLIAM: I show you all the time.

JULIA: I need you to be tender.

WILLIAM: What's that supposed to mean?

JULIA: I like you to hold me softly.

WILLIAM: (Mockingly) Oh, you need more 'cuddle time'?

JULIA: Yes.

WILLIAM: You want me to 'spoon you' more? Is that it?

JULIA: (getting stressed) What would be wrong with that?

WILLIAM: C'mon. You've got to be kidding me.

JULIA: Do not laugh at me.

WILLIAM: No, of course not.

JULIA: Do not mock me.

WILLIAM: What the hell do you expect?

JULIA: What?

WILLIAM: You tape me up to this chair, bring another man in to my house, so that you can tell me you want to hang out with a bunch of gossipy women, cut up pictures, and you want me to cuddle you more?!

JULIA: (Getting upset) Don't yell at me.

WILLIAM: What should I do? Cry? You want me to be some kind of freakin' wuss?

JULIA: I want you to talk to me. I want you to stop hitting me.

WILLIAM: Oh, shut up! You talk all the time! You talk too much! I can't listen that much – my ears hurt.

FRANK: Oh, they can hurt a lot more.

WILLIAM: What?

FRANK: They can hurt a lot more if you don't listen to your wife.

WILLIAM: Don't tell me what to do.

FRANK: Free advice, Willie. Take it or live with the consequences – or don't live with them.

WILLIAM: Are you threatening me? In my own God-Damn house?

JULIA: Don't swear.

WILLIAM: Don't swear? Are you kidding me?

JULIA: It's a sin.

WILLIAM: Great. Now I'm supposed to take lessons from you.

FRANK: You could use some lessons. Some guidance.

JULIA: I just don't want you to yell anymore. Don't hit me anymore. Just...don't.

WILLIAM: C'mon, babe. You like it a little rough. You like me to take control.

JULIA: Control?

WILLIAM: You know how you like it.

JULIA: I do not like it.

WILLIAM: Sure you do. All women like the man to be tough.

JULIA: Tough on the outside.

WILLIAM: And what, gooey on the inside?

JULIA: Not gooey. Just warm.

WILLIAM: Warm?

JULIA: I want you to be my soft spot. My soft landing after a rough day.

WILLIAM: Rough day? What rough day? I have rough days.

JULIA: I need you to respect me.

WILLIAM: I do respect you.

JULIA: Well, you have a weird way of showing me. I've got badges of respect all over me.

WILLIAM: What are you talking about? Your love spots?

JULIA: 'Love spots'? These are not love spots. They're black-and-blue. You hurt me, William.

WILLIAM: You don't know what hurt is.

JULIA: What?

WILLIAM: You don't know what hurt is. But I'll show you. I'll be happy to show you.

JULIA: Show me? What are you going to show me, William? Love in black-and-blue?

WILLIAM: Yeah, right. I'll show you some serious love.

JULIA: You're not going to change, are you?

WILLIAM: Change? What? My shirt? Sure. This punk ruined my shirt. Get me another one, will you babe?

JULIA: I'm not getting you another shirt. That's not the change I'm talking about.

WILLIAM: Yeah. A brown one. Then untape me so I can put it on. Or, untape me now and I'll make you feel my love.

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JULIA: I don't want to feel your love.

WILLIAM: Sure you do, babe. Just get rid of this guy so we can have a go at it.

JULIA: Go at it?

WILLIAM: Yeah, you want me to show you some rough day love, right?

JULIA: You don't get it. You're never going to understand me.

WILLIAM: I understand, babe. You want me to be more careful. I always make sure I don't give you any love spots on your face. I keep them low. Well, I'll keep them off your arms too. I can do that. I can help you.

JULIA: Off my arms will help me?

WILLIAM: Sure. That's what you're telling me, right? You want me to be rough, but not so rough your girlfriends will see. So they won't yack at you about it.

JULIA: I can't believe I've let it go so far. You really played me, didn't you? You acted so smoothly. Notching it up little by little.

WILLIAM: What are you talking about?

JULIA: You've hurt me, William. You say you love me, but you hurt me. You hit me when you get angry...

WILLIAM: I'm sorry about that, doll. You know how I lose control.

JULIA: And I've almost made it alright. I've let you get away with it for so long.

WILLIAM: I don't mean to...

JULIA: But now I'm afraid for Joanne. I'm afraid you'll do it to her.

WILLIAM: I would never hit my flesh-and-blood.

JULIA: I don't know that I can believe you.

WILLIAM: What?

JULIA: I saw how you looked at her. I saw how you looked at her when she spilled her milk and cereal this morning.

WILLIAM: I was just having a rough get-up. You know how hard it is for me in the morning. How I'm irritable.

JULIA: I do know.

WILLIAM: I'm irritable in the AM. But I would never hit my little girl.

JULIA: You used to call me that.

WILLIAM: What?

JULIA: You used to call me 'you're little girl'. It was sweet.

WILLIAM: I loved you.

JULIA: Past tense?

WILLIAM: That's not what I meant. You know that.

JULIA: I know you used to call me 'you're little girl', and now you hit me all the time.

Frank is just leaning against a counter – as if he was invisible. Or a part of the cabinet. But he's transfixed on the conversation. He's not been here before.

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WILLIAM: No, I..

JULIA: And now I'm afraid of what you'll do to Joanne. What you'll do to me.

WILLIAM: You don't need to be afraid. I'm the 'poppa' (obviously a term of affection that they use).

JULIA: You are the poppa. But I don't want our kids to turn out like us.

WILLIAM: Excuse me?

JULIA: I don't want Joanne to think it's OK for some man to hit her.

WILLIAM: You said 'kids'.

JULIA: I don't want Joanne to think that's what love is.

WILLIAM: You said 'kids'.

JULIA: No I didn't.

WILLIAM: You said you didn't want our kids...plural.

JULIA: Well, only for a moment.

WILLIAM: What's that supposed to mean?

JULIA: It means I'm not making it plural.

WILLIAM: Julia, are you?

JULIA: Only for a moment.  
The kettle is beginning to whistle, but quite softly.

WILLIAM: Julia, what are you talking about?

JULIA: I'm talking about breaking the cycle.

WILLIAM: What cycle?

JULIA: I'm breaking the cycle, William. I will not bring my children up in a house without love. Where they think it's OK to hit their beloved until they bleed.

WILLIAM: What do you mean 'my children'?

JULIA: I mean Joanne. I won't have Joanne feeling afraid of you the way I do.

WILLIAM: What's the rest of it?

JULIA: I won't have our daughter feel like she needs to cry under her blanket so she can sleep at night. I don't want her to be afraid of her father! I won't bring her up that way.

WILLIAM: Grumbling, speaking slowly. What's the rest of it, Julia? What are you not telling me?

JULIA: I won't bring any other kids into the world that way.

WILLIAM: What 'other kids'?

JULIA: Our other kids! I won't have it!

WILLIAM: Getting loud ...What other kids, Julia?!

JULIA: Our other kids! I won't have our other kids! Our other kids, damn it. She's starting to cry here. I can't do it.

WILLIAM: What do you mean you can't have our other kids?

JULIA: I won't bring them up in a house without love. I won't raise my daughter to be afraid of men, and I won't raise a son who beats other women.

WILLIAM: A son?

JULIA: (She looks at him for a moment. Studying the man she loves and married) I'm finished, William. We're finished.

WILLIAM: What?

JULIA: I'm leaving you, William. I'm taking Joanne, and we're leaving.

WILLIAM: Sounding mean No you're not.

JULIA: I'm having an operation, and I'm leaving you behind.

WILLIAM: No, you're not! He pushes himself forward, almost getting to stand up, trying to knock Julia to the ground.

Frank grabs the tea kettle off of the stove, which has been whistling, and in cat-like fashion, he twirls around, his coat billowing, and splashes William in the face with the boiling water, in such a way so that Julia doesn't get hit with the water.

WILLIAM: Aargh! He's hurt, plops back down, but he can't rub his eyes. His face is dripping. He's also angry. I'll...kill...you....

FRANK: Calmly I don't think so. Turning to Julia – Are you alright?

JULIA: She nods “yes” to Frank. I'm leaving, William. You can't stop me.

WILLIAM: How can you do this?

JULIA: Because this is what it takes. I have to do something extreme so that this mess will stop. I wish I had the strength before, but I didn't. But when I was late, and after I saw the doctor, who asked me about the bruises on my back at the same time he told me the news...I was terrified. Terrified of what it would mean if you didn't stop. I need you to stop. But I see now that you can't. It's part of who you are. I don't know why I couldn't see it before. It started small. But now I can see it. You'll never change. It's strange what a person can get used to.

WILLIAM: Fighting crying-maybe realizing for the first time that he isn't actually in control. You can't just leave it like this.

JULIA: I want you to be happy, William. I hope you find someone who can make you happy. But when you do, if you do, I hope you can make her happy too. Don't hurt the ones you love, William.

WILLIAM: You can't leave me, Julia. I'll find you.

JULIA: She's remarkably composed. Standing tall near the door. She looks at Frank.

FRANK: Looks at Julia, and understands. No, you won't Willie. You won't even go looking for her.

WILLIAM: He is crying now

JULIA: I'm leaving now, William. I'm going to get Joanne from the sitter's, and I'm taking the car and I'm leaving. Don't come after me, William. If you've ever loved me, you'll let us go.

She leaves. William is still in the chair, dripping, and crying. Frank watches through the window, waiting for her to be of some distance. He pulls out a butterfly knife, opens it and steps behind William – holding the knife and looking at both it and William. He puts it low, behind William's back – we don't know if he's going to cut the tape or William.

Blackout.

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