

# Next Year, Transformers!

By

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## **Characters**

Kyle Renfrow, early 30s. An unhappy man in a store bought Darth Vader costume.

Melissa Hannigan, early 30s, His ex-wife. She is wearing a home-made Princess Leia ensemble.

## **Setting**

A park bench. Halloween night, just after dark.

## **Synopsis**

A divorced couple make the peace necessary to save Halloween for their young son.

## **Bio**

Paul Donnelly is newly based in Honolulu, having spent eight years in Atlanta and most of his life around Washington DC. His work has won the Source Theatre Company National 10-Minute Play Contest, the Larry Neal Writers Award for Drama, and the Virginia Playwriting Prize, and twice been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award. He has had pieces in the 2015-2017 Atlanta One-Minute Play Festivals and readings in Working Title Playwrights' First Light series and the Bare Essentials Reading series. He is a member of the Dramatist Guild, the Klunch, the New Play Exchange, the Playwrights' Center, and Working Title Playwrights.

For my father.

Next Year, Transformers

Setting: A bench under a streetlamp in a suburban pocket park. Halloween night. Just after dark.

At Rise: We see a man in a store bought Darth Vader costume sitting alone on the bench. He has his masked face in his hands and is weeping.

MELISSA approaches hastily. She is wearing a homemade Princess Leia get up. She stops when she sees him. She pauses briefly, but she is loaded for bear.

MELISSA

How ... What were ... I don't even know ... How ... What ... I can't even ... (pauses)  
You are a total idiot. (pause) I mean, what were you thinking? What did you hope to accomplish?

KYLE (Darth Vader) is still overcome with emotion. His attempt to control his sobs comes through the mask as an oddly familiar labored breathing.

MELISSA

For god's sake take off that stupid mask!

KYLE does. He struggles to remove the mask. The struggle stops his weeping. When he finally has the mask off his face is a study in abject misery.

MELISSA

You are ... I can't ... I should really ... (a beat) ...

KYLE buries his face in his hands.

MELISSA

No. No more crying. Stop it right now.

KYLE does not stop crying.

MELISSA

I mean it.

KYLE tries to compose himself, but is not successful.

MELISSA

Look. I'm not going to let them arrest you.

KYLE is finally able to compose himself.

MELISSA

Luke is upset enough. He doesn't need to see you hauled off in handcuffs.

KYLE

He hates me.

MELISSA

Do you blame him?

KYLE (after a long pause)

Would it kill you to offer a little false comfort?

MELISSA

The one who needs comfort is Luke. How you could have made things worse than last year, I do not know. But damned if you haven't.

KYLE

Did you hear what he said to me?

MELISSA

No. I was busy explaining to the cop that I knew you.

KYLE

He said "Go away. I don't have to see you until a week from Saturday."

MELISSA

You ruined his Halloween for the second year in a row. What did you expect him to say?

KYLE

I was trying to make up ...

MELISSA

Showing up unannounced this year does not make up for not showing up at all last year.

KYLE

You know I had to work ...

MELISSA

You couldn't call?

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

I rest my case.

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

Well I have to get back. Will you remember to come for him next Saturday?

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

Okay then.

MELISSA starts to exit.

KYLE

Mel ...

MELISSA

What?

KYLE

I need you to let me say something.

MELISSA (after a beat)

Go ahead.

KYLE

It hurts me ... no it kills me ... to admit I forgot to call last year. It kills me to know how that hurt Luke. And I know it did. I know I hurt him. And I know how much.

MELISSA

That's a start.

KYLE

I need you to help me find some way to make it up to him.

MELISSA

Me?

KYLE

You see him every day. I see him every other week. We agreed we weren't going to let our stuff affect him.

MELISSA

I have never said a word against you.

KYLE

You're a great mother. I need you to help me be at least an adequate father. For him.

MELISSA

I'm hardly a great mother.

KYLE

Imagine, us disagreeing.

MELISSA

Not about him. Not about wanting what's best for him.

KYLE

No, you have your own reasons to hate me.

MELISSA

I don't hate you. I never loved you so hating you would be a bit much.

KYLE

Ouch.

MELISSA

Let's be real. You never loved me, either. We did what we thought we had to for Luke. I just happened to find someone else first and gave us the out.

KYLE

If that's what you'd like to believe.

MELISSA

You could have a life, too. If you'd let yourself.

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

Although I do miss your capacity for withdrawal.

KYLE

It's usually just that I don't know what to say. What to do. And then when I do things ... I want to make things up to Luke and I end up making them worse ...

MELISSA

I'll tell you how you don't make things up to him. You don't make things up to him by sitting at the end of a suburban cul de sac in a dark car on Halloween night in a Darth Vader costume!! The officer told me that they got 11 calls.

KYLE

I didn't want to get out of the car until I saw you guys. I wanted to surprise him.

MELISSA

Seeing his father in squad car sure surprised him.

KYLE

When you told me the theme this year was Star Wars ... I thought it was a sign ... I thought what could be more perfect.

MELISSA

"Luke, I am your father" isn't even the line!

KYLE

Close enough.

MELISSA

We should have named him for your grandfather instead of mine.

KYLE

"Prescott, I am your father?"

MELISSA

That would have brought its own set of problems, I guess.

KYLE

What can I do? "Go away. I don't have to see you 'til a week from Saturday." "Have to see you." "Have to."

MELISSA

He's eight. He says things. He says things to me all the time. Cara's twelve. You should hear the stuff she says to Richard. They evidently have a pact. Luke's only ugly to me; Cara's only ugly to Richard. I guess we're lucky. Usually kids can't wait to go after the steps.

KYLE

What was Cara done up as back there?

MELISSA

Laguna Blue from Monster High. God help us, she even does an extremely faux Australian accent. Better that than a freakin' Disney princess, I guess.

KYLE

Monster High?

MELISSA

For starters, you have to keep up. Know what he's interested in. Learn to feign interest. There are days when I think if I hear one more word about Optimus Prime I'm going to stick needles in my eyes. But I nod. And I keep my eyes bright but not glassy. And I root for the Autobots and I boo the Decepticons. And I believe with all my heart that Optimus was cooler before he became a Power Master.

KYLE

Really?

MELISSA

Because Luke does. See, he is like you. He always likes the early stuff better.

KYLE

This isn't helping.

MELISSA

You have to listen to what I'm saying and not wait for me to say something that's going to make it easy.

KYLE

Of course you know this stuff ... you're with him every day.

MELISSA

Then you have to work harder.

KYLE

I thought the problem is always that I work too much.

MELISSA

Not at the store.

KYLE

Y'know it's not like that's what I want to be doing. I didn't lie in bed nights when I was 7 dreaming of managing a Quick Stop. It's not like I'm pushing my kid aside to pursue some ego trip or make buckets of money.

MELISSA

I didn't say ...

KYLE

I'm struggling to make enough to get by and not get my ass fired, okay?



MELISSA

I know that.

KYLE

Last Halloween, I had two no call no shows and one call to cancel a shift six minutes before she was due to start. I was alone in that hell hole and I just didn't get a moment to call ...

MELISSA

Don't let yourself off too easy.

KYLE

What?!?

MELISSA

If you hadn't been afraid to talk to him you would've called. Blowing him off was easier than hearing his disappointment.

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

Don't shut down.

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

Kyle!

KYLE is silent.

MELISSA

It's never going to be easy. Ever.

KYLE

So what do I do from here?

MELISSA

Remember it's about him. And for god's sake don't try to make up for your mistakes with some big gesture. You have to prove to him you care over and over and over, but in little ways.

KYLE

How?

MELISSA

You have to take Luke 101 and remedial Luke. Go home and google Optimus Prime. Learn the stories. Watch a few episodes. When you hang out with him really listen. Richard knows more about who's dating who at Monster High than any sane 38 year old should.

KYLE

I don't want time with me to be something he has to do. Some burden we put on him.

MELISSA

Don't be stupid. If he didn't love you so much it wouldn't hurt him so much when you let him down. That wall he's throwing up is paper thin.

KYLE

Can I come back with you now?

MELISSA

Wow. I don't know ...

KYLE

Do you have your cell on you?

MELISSA

Yeah.

KYLE

Call Richard. Ask him if it's okay. I'm good with no more surprises tonight.

MELISSA

It's not about Richard. He'll be fine. No offense, but he's really not threatened by you.

KYLE

No reason he should be.

MELISSA is silent.

KYLE

Well ...

MELISSA

I'm not comfortable with the whole "Luke has three parents; Cara only has two" dynamic.

KYLE

So we can never do things together?

MELISSA

Planned things.

KYLE

She has never seemed to mind me.

MELISSA

No. Although she would have killed you cheerfully last year.

KYLE

To her everlasting credit.

MELISSA

But you remind her that she doesn't have a ... a mother. A birth mother.

KYLE

You were going to say "real" mother, weren't you?

MELISSA

Aren't you Luke's real father?

KYLE

Yes and no. Y'know I do actually love the kid enough to want Richard to be a real father to him, too.

MELISSA

Thank you.

KYLE

And do you honestly think Cara spends much time forgetting that her mother is dead whether I'm around or not?

MELISSA

I know. And I don't. We're very polite to each other. Kind even. But I don't feel like we're forging much of a connection.

KYLE

"Physician, heal thyself."

MELISSA

What ever do you mean?

KYLE

Be patient and stop looking for the miracle breakthrough moment.

MELISSA begins and thinks better of several responses. Finally, she just blows KYLE a big resounding raspberry.

KYLE is momentarily startled. Then he begins to laugh. After a beat she joins in.

KYLE

So I'm going to throw this junk in my car, then lets catch up with Richard and the kids.

MELISSA is silent.

KYLE

I see why you don't like when I do that.

MELISSA

Okay. Let's do it.

KYLE

Thank you. (THEY start off.) One more favor?

MELISSA

Yes?

KYLE

When they start planning next year's adult theme, would you push for Tansformers?

MELISSA

We'll see.

KYLE

"We'll see"?

MELISSA

By next year Transformers may be so two crazes ago.

KYLE shrugs and nods.

MELISSA (exiting)

You have to keep up.

KYLE follows her as lights fade to BLACK.

End of *Next Year Transformers*.