



**I'M GONNA
PRAY FOR YOU
SO HARD**

BY HALLEY FEIFFER



DRAMATISTS
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The world premiere of I’M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD was presented by Atlantic Theater Company (Neil Pepe, Artistic Director; Jeffery Lawson, Managing Director), New York City, on January 7, 2015. It was directed by Trip Cullman, the set designer was Mark Wendland, the costume designer was Jessica Pabst, the lighting designer was Ben Stanton, the sound designer was Daniel Kluger, and the production stage manager was Lori Ann Zepp. The cast was as follows:

ELLA Betty Gilpin
DAVID Reed Birney

I’M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD was developed during a residency at the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center (Preston Whiteway, Executive Director; Wendy Goldberg, Artistic Director) in 2014.

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CHARACTERS

ELLA: Twenties. An up-and-coming actress.

DAVID: Seventies. A famous playwright. Ella's father.

PLACE

ACT I: An Upper West Side Manhattan apartment.

ACT II: A downtown New York City black box theater.

TIME

ACT I: Present day.

ACT II: Five years later.

I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD

Scene 1

An enormous eat-in kitchen in a large but gone-to-seed prewar apartment on the Upper West Side. Late at night. The room is a mess — papers and books clutter the table; half-empty wine bottles dot every surface; overflowing ashtrays and old plates of crusty leftovers are scattered about.

Ella and David sit at the table.

Ella wears no makeup. She wears long cut-off denim shorts and a flannel shirt. Her hair is pulled back into a ponytail.

David has scraggly gray hair and gray stubble. He wears outdated Coke-bottle glasses, rumpled khaki pants with ink stains on the pockets, and a wrinkled button-down shirt with the top few buttons unbuttoned, revealing white chest hair.

They both drink white wine with ice. The recently-opened magnum bottle is on the table. They both smoke cigarettes. They are in the middle of a heated conversation.

DAVID. See that's what I'm talking about — they're all fucking idiots —

ELLA. I know, I know —

DAVID. No you *don't* know, Ella! Let me finish —

ELLA. Sorry —

DAVID. They are a sick cadre of pathetic, sniveling, *tiny* men with

micropenises and *no* imaginations who write out of their asses and who *love* to tear you down because in truth they know that you are doing *exactly* what they could never do — that you are doing the only thing they have ever *wanted* to do — and they are fucking *jealous*. You know that, don't you? How jealous they are? They're *boiling* with envy. They want a *piece* of you. They want in. They wanna get *inside* you! They wanna *climb right in!*

ELLA. (*Laughing.*) Whoa!

DAVID. I'm *serious*. They wanna *fuck* you. They wanna fuck you so hard, they're *blind* with fuck-rage.

ELLA. (*Mesmerized.*) Wow!

DAVID. *Yes*. “Wow” is right! And even though they're almost exclusively queers — you think that matters? It doesn't matter! Because the kind of fucking they wanna do to you is gender-blind, soul-blind — they're blind to it themselves!

ELLA. Right!

DAVID. I mean it's like a fucking snot-nosed kid dipping your braid in his *inkwell!* They get a kind of pleasure out of being *perverse*.

ELLA. HAH!

DAVID. I'm not kidding. Why are you laughing?

ELLA. I'm not —

DAVID. It's like a pedophile and his *prey!* Humbert Humbert and Lolita! She obsesses him and this disgusts him so he abuses her and then he *fucks* her, and then abuses her and then *fucks* her again!

ELLA. *Yes* — *yes!*

DAVID. I mean haven't you realized it's always the *brilliant* performances that are the ones that go unnoticed — or even worse! — the ones that get the kind of condescending, bullshit mentions like: “The *serviceable* Ella Berryman.”

ELLA. Oh god.

DAVID. “The capable ... ”

ELLA. “The reliable ... ”

DAVID. “The sturdy ... ”! As if you're a fucking *stool* they enjoyed *sitting* on for the evening!

ELLA. I know — I *know!*

DAVID. Or even worse: just the name, in *parentheses* — “When Medvedenko professes his love to Masha” — and then in parentheses: “(Ella Berryman)” —

ELLA. Oh god! The *worst!*

DAVID. Oh god, and *then!* What's even *worse!* Just to rub some

salt in the wound — just really *grind* it in — after giving you the requisite, dismissive nod — “Ella Berryman,” (close paren) — *then*, a paragraph later they’ll say: “Well, the *real* pleasure of the evening is the *exquisite* performance of — ”

ELLA. (*Loving this.*) Oh god — just *stop!* Just stop right there!

DAVID. And then they pick the *one person* in the cast who’s a fucking *hack!*

ELLA. (*Giggling.*) Of course — of *course!*

DAVID. The one actor who’s chewing the scenery as if he just got fucking *dentures* and he’s getting executed next *Tuesday!*

ELLA. (*Laughing.*) I know — I *know!*

DAVID. Or the “*ingénue*” — the girl who’s sexy, or (maybe more accurately) what a gay man thinks he’s *supposed* to think is sexy —

ELLA. Ugh, like *Clementine*.

DAVID. Exactly! Like that fucking *Clementine* in your play! (*Ironically.*) Your perfect little “Nina” ...

ELLA. Oh gross. *Gross!*

DAVID. But that’s exactly what they *want!* A wide-eyed, little brain-dead ... *trout-mouth* who clearly only a man *terrified* of his own *mortality* would want to fuck!

ELLA. (*Suddenly very sad.*) But *everyone* wants to fuck her ...

DAVID. Well everyone fucking *hates* themselves!

ELLA. (*Giggling.*) That’s true — that’s *true!*

DAVID. That’s why Bertrand cast her, didn’t he? We know that, don’t we? I mean, it’s certainly not because she’s a good fucking *actress!*

ELLA. (*Laughing.*) No!

DAVID. It’s not because of her emotional *depth!*

ELLA. Right!

DAVID. Her *subtlety!*

ELLA. Hah!

DAVID. Her *nuance!*

ELLA. YEAH!

DAVID. The undeniable *truth* she brings to the role!

ELLA. (*Dying laughing.*) You’re killing me — you’re *killing* me!

DAVID. I mean any director worth his salt? Finds that kind of actress *repugnant*.

ELLA. I hope so. I *hope* so ...

DAVID. But Bertrand’s an old *bag*. A has-been — a joke. A formerly-famous-now-completely-washed-up *hack!*

ELLA. (*A bit shocked by his vitriol.*) Dad...!

DAVID. *I can't help it! I didn't make him that way!*

ELLA. Okay, okay ...

DAVID. I knew he was a moron when I sent him my play —

ELLA. *Slow Burn?*

DAVID. No, an older draft of the new one — the one I'm working on now —

ELLA. *Canarsie?*

DAVID. That was a working title, it's untitled now —

ELLA. Oh.

DAVID. — And he didn't even read it. He sent a note to my *agent*. "I'm a great admirer of David's," he wrote, "but I'm afraid my calendar year is full." (*He laughs darkly.*)

ELLA. Well ...

DAVID. What.

ELLA. He *is* ... really ... busy ...

DAVID. Oh Jesus Christ, Ella — don't make me throw up.

ELLA. (*Suddenly reticent.*) What...?

DAVID. He's not "busy." Ella! He's *afraid*.

ELLA. "Afraid"?

DAVID. He's *safe*.

ELLA. (*Not quite understanding.*) "Safe" ...?

DAVID. He knows that at this stage in his sputtering, stagnant, *lifeless* career, the critics only *like* you if you're "safe."

ELLA. Okay.

DAVID. If you do the same bullshit they've been stroking your *dick* for for thirty years — just regurgitate the same *schlock* you've been spooning us for decades and dress it up like it's new when anyone with half a brain can clearly see it's *garbage*.

ELLA. Okay.

DAVID. (*With fiery resolve.*) But that's the *one thing* you *never* want to be, Ella.

ELLA. Okay.

DAVID. Be *transgressive*.

ELLA. Okay ...

DAVID. Be *upsetting*.

ELLA. Okay...!

DAVID. Be *bewildering!*

ELLA. *Okay!*

DAVID. But above all — above *all else?* Do *not* be safe. (*Beat.*) *Be anything but safe.* (*She beams at him.*)

ELLA. Thanks, Dad. *Thanks.* (He smiles back at her. Pours himself more wine.)

DAVID. So it makes *sense* he'd cast a trampy twig like "Clementine" in your role.

ELLA. Right!

DAVID. Better cast a non-*threatening* Nina so all the men in the audience who think they're *Konstantin* don't feel completely *emasculated*!

ELLA. *Right!*

DAVID. Plus, I'm sure he just wanted something *pretty* to look at in the rehearsal room while he fades away into utter *obscurity*!

ELLA. (*Erupting in a fit of giggles.*) Oh Dad — oh *Dad*...!

DAVID. And that's why he cast her and not you. (*Beat.*)

ELLA. (*Stung.*) Oh ...

DAVID. (*With a shrug.*) I'm not saying you're ugly ...

ELLA. (*On the verge of tears.*) Thanks.

DAVID. I'm just saying you're *interesting*.

ELLA. (*Trying hard not to cry.*) Okay ... (*Beat.*)

DAVID. And a little ugly.

ELLA. (*Tears about to spill.*) *Dad* ...

DAVID. It was a joke! Jesus! Can't you take a *joke*?!

ELLA. (*Brushing tears away.*) Yeah ...

DAVID. (*Drag on cigarette.*) You're never gonna get very far in this life if you don't have a sense of humor about yourself.

ELLA. (*Glumly.*) Okay ...

DAVID. (*Stubs out his cigarette.*) You're brilliant, El. And if you seem like you have a brain? Then you're a Masha, I guess. In his book, I mean. He has no imagination or vision or *taste*.

ELLA. But ...

DAVID. What.

ELLA. (*Reticent.*) I ... like ... him ...

DAVID. (*Gravelly.*) Ella.

ELLA. What...?

DAVID. You "like" him?

ELLA. (*Mustering courage.*) He's nice ...

DAVID. He's "nice"?

ELLA. He is! He's fun. He's smart. He's good.

DAVID. He's "*fun*"? He's "*smart*"? He's "*good*"?

ELLA. He ... takes *care* of us.

DAVID. He *fucked* you, Ella!

I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD

by Halley Feiffer

1M, 1W

Ella is a precocious and fiercely competitive actress whose sole aim in life is making her famous playwright father, David, proud. Over the course of a boozy evening, Ella and David deliberate over whether to read the reviews of her Off-Broadway debut ... and things unravel from there. Halley Feiffer's dark, probing, and very funny new play pulls the audience into the middle of a deeply complicated relationship and sheds new light on the eternal struggles of parents and children to find common ground.

"Bone-chilling ... punishing drama."

—**The New York Times**

"[Halley Feiffer is] a writer with a lot of promise who is obviously ready for bigger acceptance and louder applause. [I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD is] provocative, sensitive, shocking and often very unsettling ... polished and probing ... left me shaking ... a tense thriller with a strong emotional line between the two characters. ... one of the best plays I've seen this season."

—**New York Observer**

"... exhilaratingly toxic ... spectacular tension and real danger."

—**Entertainment Weekly**

"... blistering, blackly funny and creepy ... The play offers two terrifically meaty roles."

—**New York Daily News**

"... viciously funny ... [In] Halley Feiffer's brutally effective I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD ... David and Ella are figures of alternating fear and pity: artistic arsonists stranded by their bridge-burning fire of ambition. ... Feiffer takes a tough look at the forces that can bring us to our knees."

—**Time Out (New York)**

Also by Halley Feiffer
HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND
THEN KILL THEM

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