

MY FATHER, MY MANAGER

by Dylan Dawson

A living room.

RON enters, tightening a particularly hideous tie. Throughout the following he buzzes around the apartment, straightening photos and adjusting pillows.

RON

Tick tock, No-No! How we doing?

NORA

(from off)

Just a second, daddy!

RON

The lady from the agency is going to *be* here in just a second, No-No, so let's hustle that butt.

NORA

(from off)

These cutlets are cold, daddy!

RON

They're supposed to be, No-No. That's how they stay firm.

Nora, 13, enters. She's awkwardly adjusting underneath her bra.

NORA

I don't like these, daddy.

RON

You want that extra oomph or don't you? You think Emma Watson doesn't stuff? Girl was stuffing by the Chamber of Secrets, *trust* me. Oh now look, you're all lopsided.

(he moves towards her)

Here let me just-

NORA

No! That's okay, daddy. I can do it.

RON

Yeah, probably best you get used to doing it on your own.

Nora turns away, and adjusts.

RON

Now one more time: when the agent gets here-

NORA

("not again")

Daddy...

RON

When the agent *gets* here, what don't we do?

NORA

Act desperate.

RON

And why don't we do that?

NORA

Because they need us more than we need them.

RON

You bet they do. And why's that?

NORA

Because with my star power and your, um...your...

RON

Passion, No-No! With your star power and my *passion*, together we can make them millions!

NORA

Right, millions.

RON

And don't you forget it.

NORA

And don't you forget it, right.

RON

No, I mean don't you forget that bit about my "passion." That stung a little. Now let's take a look at you.

She turns back around.

RON

You look perfect, No-No.

They bug.

God. They even feel real.

There's a knock at the door.

RON

(frantic)

Ohmygod, that's her! That's the agent. Now No-No, let Daddy do all the talking. Your song and monologue will tell her everything she needs to know. Okay, sit over there. Or actually no, stand. Stand by the piano. No that's weird - sit on my lap! But then I can't answer the door – ohgod!

NORA

Daddy? Calm down. They need us more, remember?

RON

That's right. You're right, No-No.

He closes his eyes, breathes, opens his eyes.

Okay.

There's another knock. He freaks out again.

Yeah, no the piano. Stand by the piano. And your fucking left cutlet's poking out!

No-No runs to the piano, fixing her cutlet. After a moment, Ron opens the door to reveal CAITLIN, 30s. She's holding a file of some kind, and is very severe

CAITLIN

Ron Collins? I'm Caitlin Snow from Child Services-

RON

From the agency, I know! Come in, come in! Of course we've been expecting you!

CAITLIN

Thank you. You're her father, correct?

RON

And manager, yes.

Caitlin enters, glancing around the living room, then at Nora.

CAITLIN

(smiles warmly)

And *you* must be Nora.

RON

That's my little No-No.

CATLIN

It's *very* nice to meet you Nora.

Nora says nothing.

And how old are you Nora?

RON

She's thirteen, but she can play older if need be. No-No, show her your eighteen.

Nora does a pouty pose that's a little disconcerting.

RON

You might recognize that look from the website. We get *so* many comments on how eighteen she looks, you wouldn't believe.

CATLIN

You mind if I sit, Mr. Collins?

RON

Please. Let's get started.

Caitlin sits, takes out her folder.

RON

So can I ask, how did your agency hear about my No-No? Not that I'm surprised, but just so I know who to thank.

CATLIN

We're not allowed to give out that information, Mr. Collins.

RON

Hey, I hear ya. I'm always telling No-No how important it is to keep certain things secret - *especially* in our business, you know?

CATLIN

Mr. Collins, if I could have a moment alone with your daughter that would be- Legally, you're allowed to say no, but we recommend that you –

RON

(puts his hands up)

Loud and clear, lady. You're not the first one to kick me out of an audition room, trust me. Besides, No-No hates it when I'm around. I'll let you guys get to it.

CATLIN

It just makes my job easier, Mr. Collins, thank you.

RON
No, thank *you*.

He takes No-No aside.

RON
Alright, No-No, this is it. Now remember, on the monologue, don't start in with the waterworks until the "I laughed too" bit, okay?

NORA
I'm nervous, daddy.

RON
What's to be nervous about? I can tell she already loves you. And she's just being stand-offish with me because that's how the agent/manager dynamic works. All you need to worry about is showing her that special stuff you're made of. That special stuff that made me take you out of school, quit my job, and devote every fiber and penny I have left into you. So don't be nervous, you're gonna be great, okay?

NORA
Okay.

He does a quick adjust of her cutlets. Caitlin sees this and makes a horrified note in her file.

RON
(to Caitlin)
Okay she's all yours! I'll check back in a few minutes to make sure you haven't run off with her. You know, to Hollywood!

He exits. Caitlin smiles at Nora.

CATILIN
You wanna have a seat, Nora?

NORA
Actually can I stand?

CATILIN
Sure, if that makes you more comfortable.

NORA
That's how we rehearsed it, yeah.

CATILIN
That's how you... Nora, I'm here to help you okay? That means be honest.

NORA
Okay.

Nora closes her eyes.

Sorry, I just need to...

CATLIN
Take your time.

Nora does a little private warm up, causing a concerned Caitlin to take some notes.

After a few more beats, Nora opens her eyes and starts in on her monologue.

NORA
When Daddy hits me, it's in the places folks don't see.

Caitlin drops her pen.

NORA
Daddy's clever that way. Clever. That's what Mamma used to call him. Before she went and got killed. I still remember her sitting up in that kitchen, smoking her Winstons with a glass of "Not For You, Child" in her hand, sayin' "Your daddy suuure thinks he's clever, baby doll. Wrecking that car of mine so I can't follow him when he's taking this month's slut out in his." Then Mamma would sort of laugh, but like the way she'd laugh when somethin' awful'd happen on the news on TV. Then one day it was Mamma on TV, or the parts of Mamma they found. And wouldn't you know it? I laughed too.

CATLIN
Oh dear God...

NORA
I laughed too. Because I knew...I knew the man who did this to Mamma wasn't some stranger in the night, some axe-wielding drifter with a thing for boozed up blondes. The monster who hacked up my Mamma was sitting next to me on the sofa, drinking from a bottle and talking how he had to pick up some dirty laundry from dry cleaners. That's right. Clever.

A beat. Nora breaks out of her monologue and flashes a little "thank you" smile. Caitlin is speechless. If a single tear could be rolling down her cheek, it would.

CATLIN
Nora. Sweetheart. Do you know why I'm here?

NORA
Um, *yeah*.

CATLIN
Nora? What if I told you I could take you away from here? What if I said there are people out there who can help you, who are *going* to help you.

NORA
You mean like, Hollywood?

CATLIN
Generally we place our children locally, but there are always exceptions. Now can you go to your room while I talk to your dad? And maybe pack a bag with some overnight clothes. A picture of your mom, maybe?

NORA
Oh daddy got rid of all mom's pictures.

CATLIN
You poor thing. Now you stay put in your room and I'll come for you soon.

Nora exits, excited. Caitlin immediately gets on her phone.

CATLIN
Gloria? It's Caitlin. I'm with the Collins kid over at 1501 Goose Lake...it's a fucking code red situation here. We need to send over...and a squad car, yeah...no I'm fine, just hurry...if he tries anything before you get here I'll just-

Ron pokes his head in.

RON
Knock knock.

Caitlin jumps, hangs up.

CATLIN
Oh god, Mr. Collins!

RON
Sooo, how'd she do?

CATLIN
Mr. Collins-

RON
Did she cry? Sometimes she can go a bit overboard with the crying, but I'm teaching her that sometimes you need to keep that pain a little hidden, you know?

CATILIN

Mr. Collins, I've been in this field for a long long time and never in my career have I come across a case like this.

RON

You mean it?

CATILIN

Frankly, Mr. Collins, I'm surprised she's gone unnoticed for this long.

RON

You don't know how happy you just –

(to himself, although Caitlin can clearly hear him)

Come on Ronnie. Don't act desperate now.

(gathers himself, puts on game face)

Caitlin. I am *very* interested in Child Services Agency taking on my daughter. But unfortunately, I have to put on my manager's hat for a sec and talk percentages. Now I know the rate for most managers is 15% percent, but I think you'll find after working with me that I'm not most managers. My cut is 22%, non-negotiable, and after what you just saw, I'm sure you'll agree that that's a bargain.

Beat.

CATILIN

How much would you say you've had to drink today, Mr. Collins?

Nora re-enters, with a suitcase.

NORA

Did you hear, Daddy? I'm going to Hollywood!

CATILIN

Nora, please, back in your room.

RON

We're just going over the paperwork, No-No. But I am so proud of you! Come here and give daddy a hug!

Caitlin rises quickly, puts her hand in her purse.

CATILIN

Mr. Collins, I'm going to have to ask you to step away from your daughter.

RON

(taking another step towards Nora)

Whoa now, lady, I was just-

Caitlin pulls a small handgun from her bag, points it at him.

CATLIN

Right now, Mr. Collins, I mean it!

RON

(putting his hands up)

Fine! Fifteen percent! Jesus, do all your agents do business like this?

CATLIN

Only in special cases, and you sir are definitely a special fucking case.

RON

Aw, thank you.

CATLIN

Now step away from the girl.

NORA

Daddy, what's happening?

RON

Nothing, No-No. Daddy's negotiating.

NORA

We're still going to Hollywood, right?

RON

Of course we are, No-No. *(to Caitlin)* Aren't we?

Silence. Ron glares at Caitlin.

RON

You know, I thought this might happen. Well, if you think you're going to just going to steal my No-No from me without a fight, or at least a buyout incentive-

CATLIN

Not another step, Mr. Collins, I mean it! Don't think I won't. I had a father just like you, you understand?

RON

Oh yeah? Is that how you got in the business?

CATLIN

I've made it my life's mission to make sure children don't have to go through what I did. So yeah, don't give me a reason to shoot you down because *I will shoot you down*, believe it!

RON

I believe it.

He takes a step forward, reaching into his breast pocket.

And that's why I'm going to –

BANG! She shoots him. He collapses. Nora runs to him.

NORA
DADDY!!!!!!

RON
Don't worry, No-No. This is that agent/manager dynamic I was talking about.

NORA
I don't like it, Daddy.

RON
It isn't pretty, I know. But do me a favor, No-No?

NORA
Anything Daddy!

Ron pulls a bloody pen from his jacket pocket. Caitlin sees this, realizes.

CATLIN
Oh god...

RON
Sign with her, No-No...you sign with this agent *right now* ...

NORA
I will, Daddy!

RON
Because that right there...*that's* passion.

He dies. Nora holds her father.

Then, after a moment, Nora stands and smiles, completely recovered from this tragedy.

NORA
So should I do the song *now*, or...?

Lights out abruptly as "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" plays.

End of deal.

