

Hot August Night

By C J Nolan

(An apartment – top floor. Classic small box. Front door opens into the living room. An eat-in kitchen to the left of the door. Bedroom and bathroom to the back. Nothing in this room stands out. The apartment is dark except for the glow from a streetlight outside and flashes of red and blue from police cars down in the parking lot.

A woman sits by the front window, phone in hand and smoking her last cigarette. She looks out the window the entire conversation .)

ESTELLE

Pearl, slow down. What? Pearl, I... Pearl! Stop stuttering, for chrissakes! I can't understand a damn word you're saying! Jesus! What's going on down there? *(listens)* Of course they would come talk to you. You live on the first floor! What happened? *(listens)* Yeah? No! You're shittin' me! Stabbed her...? Christ – that lobby's gonna be a mess. Did he rape her? *(listens)* Well, he probably did then. He raped her. They all do. That's all they want... *(listens)* Really?! That skinny thing from Building C? Whadda ya know? I tell ya – young, single women – living alone? Nothing but trouble. What? *(listens)* What did I hear? Well, what did YOU hear? Well – yeah. We all heard... something. But come on! We hear that shit all the time. Cats in heat. Drunks! Stupid couple fights. Sure. Remember the Perez family in 4A? Used to beat the crap out of each other every payday. Even worse when DYFS would show up. What are you supposed to do? Call the cops and have 'em say your neighbor complained? Screw that. He had knives and guns and everything. Let 'em kill each other – I say. *(listens)* Look! You don't have to tell the cops nothin'. You heard noises. Big deal. Who doesn't? Shit – another cop car just showed up. How many does it take, I ask ya? Look – go find out some more. *(listens)* Like what? Like do they have the guy yet? Huh? Do they know who they're lookin' for. Come on! Aren't you afraid? That creep could still be around, ya know. Hiding in the hallways or something. Go on. Go ask

and call me back. Just do what I tell ya! You'll be fine. Look at all the cops out there.
Right. Call me back. (*Hangs up the phone*).

(The front door opens. A man stands in the doorway. He wears a dark blue, polyester track suit, zipped to the neck. He is sweaty and pale – slightly balding. He is carrying a plastic bag. The man reaches over and flips on the light.)

HAROLD

Estelle?

ESTELLE

Turn out that damn light, you idiot!

HAROLD

(Turning off light) Why? What's the matter?

ESTELLE

"What's the matter" – he says! Numbskull, open you eyes! The place is crawling with cops. I don't want them to know we're home. Capeesh?

HAROLD

Why? What are they looking for?

ESTELLE

A moron in a jumpsuit. Just get in and shut that damn door. Christ. Where have you been, huh?

HAROLD

I went jogging. Like always. And I got your smokes.

ESTELLE

Thank God. I just burned my last one. Give 'em here.

HAROLD

Yes. Sorry.

ESTELLE

What are they?

HAROLD

Menthol lights. Special two-packs.

ESTELLE

So why didn't you get a carton?

HAROLD

They don't sell cartons at that little store.

ESTELLE

Mr. Big Spender, over here. So didn't you notice all the cop cars out there? Didn't they ask you questions or nothing?

HAROLD

No. I came in the back. By the dumpsters.

ESTELLE

What the hell for?

HAROLD

I thought I heard something. Thought I heard those kids again. Breaking bottles.

ESTELLE

(Laughing) And what were YOU going to do about it? Mr. Milquetoast, here. What would you have done, huh? Begged them to go away? Talked them to death??

HAROLD

There were no kids. I was mistaken.

ESTELLE

I bet you were. You're always "mistaken".

(As she lights a cigarette, he moves slowly to the window.)

HAROLD

Did they find someone?

ESTELLE

(Annoyed) What do you want?

HAROLD

There is an ambulance out there. Was someone hurt?

ESTELLE

Yeah. Someone was hurt. And a fat lot of good that ambulance is gonna be.

HAROLD

Was she.. was he dead?

ESTELLE

Duh! Yeah – dead. She was dead. Some sicko stabbed her about twenty times. In the lobby. Must have dragged her from her car. Or jumped from behind her when she opened the door. Jumped her, beat her and stabbed her to death. Christ.

HAROLD

How do you know?

ESTELLE

Because I know. Pearl lives on the first floor, right? Police talked to her. Told her all about it.

HAROLD

The girl lived here?

ESTELLE

Yeah. Some young tramp over in C.

HAROLD

Tramp?

ESTELLE

Yeah. One of those. Single. Liberated. Worked in a bar somewhere in the city. Short skirts, low cut blouses – all come on. Probably someone followed her back from the bar. That type. You've seen her.

HAROLD

Have I?

ESTELLE

(Mocking) "Have I?" Sure – if you ever walked around with your eyes open. Sniffles the Mouse, over here.

HAROLD

Sorry. Maybe I did.

ESTELLE

Sure you did.

HAROLD

It all happened right out there?

ESTELLE

Yeah. And in the lobby.

HAROLD

Did you hear it?

ESTELLE

What? No. I didn't here anything.

HAROLD

But it was right out there.

ESTELLE

Moron, the windows are closed.

HAROLD

They were open when I left.

ESTELLE

People have their air conditioners on.

HAROLD

Is ours working again?

ESTELLE

No! What's wrong with you? What's with all these questions? You working for the cops?

HAROLD

No. Sorry. I just... Well... I mean, no one helped her.

ESTELLE

And how should any of us helped her? I'm supposed to run out and what?

HAROLD

I don't know.

ESTELLE

Nothing – that's what. Someone called the cops. They're here. End of story.

HAROLD

Someone could have stopped him.

ESTELLE

Oh, and would YOU have done that? Huh? Oh yeah – I would have paid money to see that! What would you have done, honey? In your rayon jumpsuit there?

HAROLD

Track suit.

ESTELLE

Would you have leapt to her rescue like Superman? Protected her? Fought off that bad man who was strong enough to rip her clothes off, rape her, beat her to a pulp and stab her to death? YOU!?! (*Laughs*) In your blue “track suit”? Oh please. That is TOO funny!

HAROLD

He raped her? Are they certain?

ESTELLE

He ripped her panties off! Are you retarded? What do you think that means? Of course, that type – maybe she doesn’t wear underwear...

HAROLD

She wasn’t a type. She was just a young girl who lived by herself...

ESTELLE

Why are you still wearing that thing? It makes me hot just lookin’ at you.

HAROLD

I don’t want to catch a cold. The sweat is cold. The suit keeps the heat in.

ESTELLE

Well, it's gross. And you're sweatin' like a pig. You and your jogs around the park.
Christ!

HAROLD

Sorry. I need... my exercise.

ESTELLE

For what? No one cares what you look like. No one's lookin' at you. I'm not even lookin' at you. *(pause)* Do you think she was looking at you?

HAROLD

(To himself, looking out the window) She had a name. What was her name?

ESTELLE

You DO, don't you? Well, I'll be dipped in shit. You think she KNEW you! *(Laughs)*
Well well well! What happened, tiger? Huh? Did you two lock eyes putting out the garbage? Did she smile at you when you passed in the laundry? Did she wink at you as you ran around the neighborhood in that stupid getup?! Oh, you poor, pathetic creature. What could you possibly be thinking? What did you conjure in that feeble brain of yours? Did she show you a bit of tit? You think? Did you imagine her calling to you, from her car, legs spread – begging for some sweating, balding middle-aged man to come screw her brains out? Is that what you see when you close your eyes, honey? Young, sexy things dying to have you sweep them off their feet? Something you have never ever EVER done in your ENTIRE LIFE BEFORE?!

HAROLD

Sorry.

ESTELLE

Sorry?! YOU'RE sorry? You know who's sorry? ME! I'm sorry. Ten years of marriage. That's sorry. This piece of shit apartment. THAT's sorry. What a waste. A dead end marriage to a dead end man with his sad and sickening male fantasies of being some young girl's knight in shining armor. When the whole time she is just laughing behind your back! That's right – laughing! Yeah. And where am I, huh!? Where the hell am I? You don't know sorry... *(Looking out the window)* You know something? Maybe she's the lucky one. Sure. 'Cause now she doesn't have the chance to make my mistakes. Does she?

HAROLD

No.

ESTELLE

No. *(Stubbing out her cigarette)* Well, I'm gonna try to get back to sleep. Not that it's possible with these flashing lights everywhere. But I 'm tired. *(Walking back toward the bedroom)* And don't you dare think of coming near this door before you take a shower! Christ, you reek!

HAROLD

Sorry. I'll shower.

ESTELLE

Yeah. Sure.

(ESTELLE exits. After a moment, HAROLD turns back to the window, facing the audience. He reaches up and begins to unzip his track suit. As the suit is unzipped,

slowly his t-shirt is revealed to the audience. It is soaked in fresh blood. HAROLD looks down at the shirt and runs his fingers along his chest.)

HAROLD

(Without the slightest trace of remorse) I'm sorry.

Blackout

THE END