

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Paddy Chayefsky

The Girl is crying, in near hysterics...

A knock at the door. She opens it, sees her employer.)

THE GIRL

Hello, Mr. Kingsley. How are you? I didn't expect you personally. I thought they were going to send the boy up.

THE MANUFACTURER

It was on my way. I live right in the neighborhood.

THE GIRL

Come in for a minute, Mr. Kingsley.

THE MANUFACTURER

Perhaps it would be better if I waited out here.

THE GIRL

There's nobody home, Mr. Kingsley.

THE MANUFACTURER

I was under the impression someone was sick in your family.

THE GIRL

No. Please come in.

(THE MANUFACTURER moves tentatively into the foyer. THE GIRL has already turned on her heel and is moving with nervous quickness down the foyer. THE MANUFACTURER closes the door and follows her slowly. THE GIRL reappears in the living room, coming quickly to the telephone table, where her purse is lying. She opens it, takes out a stapled pile of papers, turns toward the living-room door through which THE MANUFACTURER is just now coming)

THE GIRL

Please excuse the condition of the room, Mr. Kingsley. Here are the slips, Mr. Kingsley. I hope they're the ones.

THE MANUFACTURER

(Taking the papers) You seem very distraught. Is there something I can do?

THE GIRL

No, no, Mr. Kingsley, no, that's all right. I'm all right. Well, I'll tell you what it is. I had a fight with my husband, and we're breaking up, and I don't know. *(The thin veneer of her control begins to crack. She turns nervously away, trying not to cry)* Oh, I don't know. *(A hoarse, racking sob escapes her now, and she begins to cry with painful and deep agony. The tears stream down her cheeks, and she walks quickly away from her boss, horribly embarrassed. She mumbles)* Excuse me, Mr. Kingsley...

THE MANUFACTURER

(A little ill at ease) Don't be silly.

THE GIRL

Excuse me... *(She sits down on the soft chair and bends forward so that her face is buried in her knees. She sits, hunched into a ball, as if she were in physical pain, unsuccessfully trying not to cry, mumbling between sobs)* I'm sorry, Mr. Kingsley...

THE MANUFACTURER

Isn't there anybody home with you here? Your mother or somebody?

(THE GIRL abruptly stands up again, and, shielding her face with her hand, she walks around the living room. THE MANUFACTURER stands, not quite sure what to do.)

THE GIRL

(As she walks, mumbling) Stay with me a minute, please, Mr. Kingsley.

THE MANUFACTURER

I'm sorry dear. I didn't hear what you said.

THE GIRL

I said, stay with me a minute, please. I'm sorry about this, Mr. Kingsley.

THE MANUFACTURER

Don't be so embarrassed. Sometimes life gets so complicated, the only thing you can do is scream.

THE GIRL

(In confusion) It just burst out of me. I've been calling my friends all day, but none of them are home. It's just one of those days. He's a nice guy, really, my husband. Everybody likes him. He's a piano player. No, he's more than that. He's a pianist. He plays classical as well as jazz. He's very good-looking, by the way. He flirts a lot, but I don't think he ever did anything. That's just one of his little vanities, that he's so attractive, and I don't mind it, really. No, that's not true. I do mind it a lot. But that isn't it, his flirting, I mean. Oh, Mr. Kingsley, you'd better grab those sales slips and escape. Don't let me take advantage of you like this.

THE MANUFACTURER

Please, Betty, don't worry about me.

THE GIRL

You know what my husband would do if he came in like you just did and found me breaking down like I just did, do you know what he'd do? He'd turn on the television set, do you know what I mean, Mr. Kingsley? Or else he'd invite the neighbors in. Anything except sit down with me and talk things out. Oh, I'm not being fair to him. He tried, he really tried. You just can't imagine how naive I was about marriage, Mr. Kingsley. I really thought you lived happily ever after. Look, Mr. Kingsley, if I sound like I'm blaming my husband, I don't want to sound that way. This is me. I wanted poor George to make up for everything I never had in my life. My father ran away when I was six years old. Oh, Mr. Kingsley, here I go again. You'd better get out of here because I've been building up all day like a volcano.

THE MANUFACTURER

Please don't worry about me.

THE GIRL

(Suddenly) Did you ever go downtown in the afternoon by the Paramount Theatre? Did you ever see those fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds hanging around, cutting school? They're the loneliest-looking kids in the world. Well, that's just what I was like when I was a kid. I used to go to the Paramount three or four times a week. I didn't cut school, though. I was always very good in school. Can I get you something to eat or drink, Mr. Kingsley? I don't know what we have in the house. I haven't eaten all day, but do you know what I mean by lonely kids, Mr. Kingsley? *(She begins to cry; she wanders around the room, distracted)*

I'm sorry, Mr. Kingsley, but just seeing you sitting there, listening to me... Boy, you came here just to pick up a couple of sales slips. Oh, Mr. Kingsley, I'm so glad you came. My husband, George, the last couple of months, we've hardly talked to each other. He comes home and I ask him what happened during the day. He always says, "Nothing." We never eat home any more. We go to a restaurant and we just sit there, eating. He doesn't know what to do with me, do you know what I mean? There's no love or anything. Well, I can't stand that. I want him to love me. I want him to be pleased to see me. I want him to come home and tell me all that's happened to him and how he feels about things. And I want to tell him how I feel. I want something. I mean, is this what marriage is? Is this what life is? Boy, life isn't much if that's what it is. The other night we had this big fight and he came in the next morning...

(She sits up quickly, leaning across to her boss, eager to tell another incident. She notices he is looking at his watch)

THE MANUFACTURER

(Smiling) You know what time it is?

THE GIRL

Boy I've been talking your head off.

THE MANUFACTURER

It's half-past six. Do you mind if I use your phone?

THE GIRL

Mr. Kingsley, I'm terribly sorry I used up your afternoon like this.

THE MANUFACTURER

Don't be sorry. Do you feel better?

THE GIRL

Oh, I feel much better. (*She stands*) I really do, got this all off my chest. Gee, half-past six. I don't know where my mother and my sister are. My mother's on a new shift now. I don't know what time she gets home. Would you like to stay for dinner, Mr. Kingsley?

THE MANUFACTURER

No, I don't think so, dear. I have to make a call though.

THE GIRL

The phone's right there. (*He reaches for the phone, but before he can pick up the receiver, THE GIRL is talking again*) So, what do you think I ought to do? I've been considering a divorce for a couple of months now, but it seems so complicated. I don't know anybody who's divorced, so I don't know how you go about it. My mother, she won't hear about divorce. My grandmother was Catholic. My mother's a Lutheran, but even so. My husband, it would just kill him. His vanity would be so hurt.

(*She sits and stares at the middle-aged, cigar-smoking man in the soft chair*)

THE MANUFACTURER

Betty, tell me something. How old are you?

THE GIRL

I'll be twenty-four in March.

THE MANUFACTURER

Twenty-four years old. I have a daughter of my own, twenty-five years old, lives out in New Rochelle, she's married now with two children, and you make me think of her when she was ten years old. So, I'm going to talk to you like I was your father. You've been asking me, "What should I do about my husband?" Betty, this is a decision you have to make for yourself. Don't expect your mother to make it for you, or your husband's mother, and don't worry so much about hurting your husband.

THE GIRL

Because I know this would hurt him.

THE MANUFACTURER

The only person you have to worry about hurting is yourself. You have to do what you want to do, not what other people want you to do; otherwise you and everyone else concerned will be miserable. You have to say to yourself, "Do I want to go back to him or do I think I can find something better for my life?"

THE GIRL

I don't want to go back to him.

THE MANUFACTURER

All right, there's your decision. (*THE GIRL looks at him, a little confused at the sudden clarity of her situation*) If it means a divorce, then you go ahead and get one. You go to a lawyer, and he'll tell you what you'll have to do. It may be a little complicated, but nothing is too complicated. Then you start going out on dates again, and take my word for it, you'll run across some young fellow who will understand that you need a lot of kindness. There are plenty of nice young fellows around, believe me.

THE GIRL

You know something? I really feel much better now...

THE MANUFACTURER

Sure, you do...

THE GIRL

... talking it out like this.

THE MANUFACTURER

Well, you made a decision, and suddenly there's not such big, black clouds in the sky, and it isn't going to rain, and life isn't so terrible. Life, believe me, can be a beautiful business. And you're a young kid, and you got plenty of joy ahead of you. So go wash your face. I want to make a phone call.

THE GIRL

(*Stands*) I want to thank you very much, Mr. Kingsley, for letting me pour my heart out.

THE MANUFACTURER

There's nothing to thank, sweetheart.

(THE MANUFACTURER *reaches over for the phone and begins to dial.*)

THE GIRL

Your wife must have had a wonderful life with you.

(THE MANUFACTURER *pauses in his dialing to look up at THE GIRL.*)

THE MANUFACTURER

(*Touched*) That's a very sweet thing for you to say, my dear.

THE GIRL

Well, I'll go wash my face.

THE MANUFACTURER

(*On the phone*) Hello, Evelyn, this is Jerry...

No, I'll tell you what happened. Is Lillian still there? ...

Well, I see it's half-past six. I tell you, I'm very, very tired right now. Why don't you drive out with Lillian, and I'll catch a bite around the corner, and you can take the train in from New Rochelle tomorrow...

Well, I'll tell you. I never got out to Brooklyn. Remember I told you about this girl in the office who was sick?

I didn't tell you? ...

No, Betty Preiss, the very pretty one. She sits by the reception window...

You know her. The very pretty one. So I had to stop off at her house, pick up some papers she had, she didn't come in today. So I come up here, I tell you, this girl was in an emotional state. So, to cut a long story short, I talked to her, it turns out, she's leaving her husband, that's why she couldn't come in today, and it poured out of her, the whole story...

No, no, no, the brunette girl, the very pretty one. The fat one is Elaine...

The exceptionally attractive one. I used to look at her, I used to think, "A beautiful girl like that, what problems could she have? The young men must fall all over themselves." This girl is a real beauty. I've seen lots of girls on television who aren't so beautiful. An intelligent girl, a good worker, but emotionally very immature...

(*Annoyed*) Oh, don't be foolish. What did you mean, I'm showing a marked interest in how beautiful she is? It happens that she's a very pretty girl...

All right, so you go out to New Rochelle if you want to and...

I'll tell you the truth, I think I'll just come home and go to bed...

No, I'll be fine...

Apologize to Lillian for me...

Absolutely, why should you stay in the house? ...

Fine, give my regards to Jack and the kids...

All right, I'll see you. (*He hangs up, stand, frowning for some unaccountable reason.*)

THE GIRL

I don't know what happened to my family.

(THE MANUFACTURER *has found his coat and is putting it on.*)

THE MANUFACTURER

I'll take the slips with me.

THE GIRL

I hope I didn't inconvenience you too much, Mr. Kingsley.

THE MANUFACTURER

It was no inconvenience. I was supposed to go out to the factory, but, I tell you, I was grateful to get out of it. I had the boy deliver the stuff. (*He puts on his hat*) I have the feeling you didn't eat anything at all today.

THE GIRL

You know, I really don't think I did.

THE MANUFACTURER

Well, eat something now. It's almost seven o'clock. Listen, you want a bite to eat? Come on, I'll buy you a bite to eat.

THE GIRL

I'd like to very much, Mr. Kingsley. I have to put some make-up on.

THE MANUFACTURER

Hurry up, put some make-up on.

THE GIRL

I'll just be a minute, Mr. Kingsley.

THE MANUFACTURER

(*Suddenly calling out*) You like Italian food? Very good restaurant here on Seventy-ninth Street. (*He mutters*) Jerk. Jerk. What are you doing? Jerk.