

THOSE THE RIVER KEEPS by David Rabe

Phil, an ex-con from Mulberry Street, has beaten up his wife Susie. She returns to the apartment with her friend, JANICE, in her thirties, a confidante since their waitressing days. In a monologue created for this book from dialogue in the original play, Janice is urging Susie to pack up and leave.

SCENE: An apartment in the Hollywood flats.

TIME: The present.

JANICE: Susie, this is what happens when you are locked up with no other human contact except a guy like Phil too long; your self-worth, your autonomy starts to rot. I have to say that more than once in this last segment, you seemed determined to take the art of masochistic bullshit to its limits and I didn't think I

could bear to watch another second.

(Giving SUSIE a little hug)

I mean, you know those times when recently I didn't return your calls right away—I felt awful.

(She heads for the cupboard to get wine glasses and pour the wine)

But there were just hours of the night when I didn't think I had the necessary immunities. I would feel, for godsake, what if it's contagious, this self-deluded way of relating to your own needs and what are other people's worst traits. Not that I haven't tried to exit the freeway by means of the On Ramp, myself. I mean, I know if you want to waste several years in a demented relationship, you have to pick the guy with great care. But upon occasion, it seemed you had outclassed the field. Can you imagine how macabre you must have appeared—for me to feel I had lost all points of personal reference?

I mean, where is Denise? Right? Where is she?

The three of us were so close. But where is she now? I liked Denise. I loved Denise.

But it wasn't real. I always knew it was never real.

(She puts pizza in oven.)

It was just the circumstances, we were all indentured to that same nitwit restaurateur. But when those things changed, there was nothing to keep her with us.

(As SUSIE returns from bedroom with a pile of clothes and a plastic bag of laundry. As she moves to the couch and starts to fold the clothing. Preparing to pack, JANICE moves to join her.)

But you and me, we're still here, and do you know why? Because

I think we have something permanently in common.

You remember how mad you got at me that first time I told you how I honestly felt about Phil?

That was almost the end for us, if you remember.

It started on the phone, but it got quickly too heavy, so we met at that cute little bar with the whale motif.

[SUSIE: And drank twenty-seven cappuccinos apiece, because we didn't want to drink wine, the subject was too important to get soused.]

Right, so we ended up talking like a couple of amphetamine queens! Yabbidda, yabbidda.

No, no, no, no, no. That was the whole point. You WEREN'T

married—you were THINKING ABOUT getting married. You had met him and moved in with him, but—you were in that little apartment in West Hollywood, the one with the phony Mexican door and the sickening pea-green shag rug.

Right. And across the street was The Tart, Clarice.

With her vinyl pedal pushers and her ever-expanding thunder thighs.

She was like the prototype for some form of advanced slut.

It was probably this constant display across your street that made Phil, by comparison, look human. So there you were talking about marrying this guy and the whole horrific scenario was like in electric color right before my eyes. I mean, if ever there was a Gumba who, they should not have let his antecedents off Ellis Island—it was him. But I could not get through to you. It was like some hidden adversary was jamming my signals.

Next thing I know, you're screeching at me that you wouldn't stand for me to judge you like that.

But I wasn't I kept trying to tell you. I wasn't judging you, I was judging him, I was warning you.

And then when you went into the baby madness—I mean, I wanted to ask you, do you feel no responsibility to the aesthetic requirements of the world? I mean, the Environmental Protection Agency will have your name on some official penalties list you start procreating with this set of chromosomes, they have a face like a cannoli, somebody took a bite out of it—they threw it away, somebody else stepped on it, he's what's left. How does anybody manage such a nose that takes so long to arrive at this idiotic point, and these eyes set in there like day-old rat turds in the snow. I did not know what to conclude except you had lost your mind because there WE WERE in the land of surferbodies, the land of the lean, the sun-tanned and the blonde, guys who are the result of a rigorous devotion to sun and oil and Nautilus, and there you were in this adolescent snit over this meatball from an unknown planet, he should not have left Mulberry Street ever.

I mean, you are not suggesting that you have taken offense because you feel I have defamed this bozo?