

Port City Blues

by

Jody McColman

PORT CITY BLUES

SETTING: A somewhat run-down office of a private eye, like something out of a Raymond Chandler novel. Battered desk to stage right with a green shaded desk lamp and other typical desk items. Chair behind desk and a chair in front of desk. A window behind the desk looks out on the street below.

AT RISE: Lights up on MIKE sitting behind a desk, staring out a window. NARRATOR stands far downstage left.

NARRATOR

A cold misty rain was falling on the dark streets of Port City that night. Up in the office of Mike Stone, Private Eye, the air was warm and dry despite the soft hiss of steam from the radiator under the window. The office was lit by the dim, green shaded desk lamp and the soft red neon glow of the sign outside the Last Chance Diner across the street. Back up in the office, a woman was sitting behind a battered wooden desk, staring out into the gloom. She was sultry, with lips like this year's beaujolais nouveau and hair like fall wheat. She looked up when she heard a knock at the office door.

MIKE

Come in.

NARRATOR

She said with a voice like clover honey. A man slowly opened the door and entered the office. He was strikingly handsome, the kind of handsome you only ever see in actors from mid-sized coastal New England towns.

ROCK enters, MIKE turns, stands, and extends her hand

MIKE

Michelle Stone, Private Investigator-

NARRATOR

She said, lustily.

MIKE and ROCK shake hands

MIKE

But everyone calls me Mike. Please, have a seat.

MIKE indicates the chair opposite her desk

ROCK

Thank you Ms. Stone.

ROCK sits

MIKE

Please, call me Mike.

ROCK

Mike. Yes. Sorry.

NARRATOR

He said, flashing just a hint of a dashing smile and showing a twinkle in his eye that left her breathless.

MIKE

And what can I do for you, Mister...?

ROCK

Johnson. Richard Johnson. But you can call me (beat) Rock.

MIKE

Well, Rock-

NARRATOR

Her heart fluttered like a hummingbird sipping at a cheap plastic feeder full of Red Bull.

MIKE

-how can I help you tonight.

NARRATOR

She said, eyeing him with the all the passion and desire of a soldier running to catch the last chopper out of 'Nam

ROCK

Well, you see Ms. Stone-

MIKE

Rock, please, call me Mike.

ROCK (smiling)

Of course.

NARRATOR

Again with that smile, as bright as Vegas on fight night.

ROCK

You see Mike, it's my husband. I think he's sleeping with another man.

NARRATOR

That sound you just heard was an Army helicopter crashing in to the South China Sea.

MIKE (flustered)

I see, well, what makes you think that. I mean, um, what signs have you noticed?

ROCK

Oh, just little things. He's less attentive. He seems distracted. He says he's working late, but when I call the office nobody answers. He says it's because he was at the copier, or in the bathroom, or whatever. I even found a matchbook from the Eastland Park Hotel in his jacket pocket. He said he must have picked it up when he stopped in for a drink on his way home from work one night. There's always some reasonable explanation.

MIKE (taking notes)

Mmm hmm. Anything else out of the ordinary.

ROCK

Well, we used to have a very active and passionate love life, but lately it seems he's lost interest. *(beat)* I feel like he's drifting away. Do you think you can help me, Mike? Can find out if my fears are justified?

MIKE

Yes, Rock. Yes, I can help you. These kinds of cases are bread and butter to a private investigator. But, I'll caution you, often there are very innocent explanations for this *(more)*

MIKE (cont.)

kind of behavior. He could be distracted because of a project at work, or he could be dealing with a personal issue he's not comfortable telling you about yet. I once tracked a man whose wife thought he was cheating, only to find out he'd been planning an elaborate surprise party for their twentieth wedding anniversary. He found out she'd hired me and never trusted her after that. They were divorced nine months later. So, be careful Rock. Ask yourself if this is worth it.

ROCK

I appreciate your concern Ms. Sto-, Mike. Honestly I do. But, it's taken me a long time to work up the courage just to walk through your door. Will you help me?

MIKE

Yes, Rock. I'll help you. I charge two-hundred dollars a day plus expenses.

ROCK hands MIKE an envelope of cash

ROCK

I hope this will cover it?

MIKE opens the envelope and flips through the bills, then sets the envelope on the desk and nods

MIKE

Come back and see me in a week and I'll let you know what I've found.

ROCK

Thank you, Mike.

NARRATOR

And with that he stood up and left.

ROCK exits

NARRATOR (cont.)

He walked out of the office like a timid Adonis who'd just been told his puppy has leukemia. (*long beat*) A week went by quicker than Hunter S. Thompson driving his convertible through Bat country. A light snow was falling in the Forest City the night Rock returned, and the holiday shoppers were bathed in perfect yellow lamplight, like something out of a (more)

MARRATOR (cont.)

Frank Capra film. Mike was sitting at her desk slowly going through a small stack of grainy black-and-white photos. Half a cigarette burned slowly in the ashtray under the green-shaded desk lamp. There was a soft knock at the door.

MIKE

Come in.

NARRATOR

She said as she slipped the photos into a plain manila envelope and stubbed out the cigarette as if that simple act would stub out the pain that was looming like an August thunderstorm in the Catskills.

ROCK enters

NARRATOR (cont.)

Rock entered, scared but defiant, like a small lonely pine poking out of a snow covered clearing.

MIKE

Ahh, Rock. Please, have a seat.

ROCK

Well, what did you find out?

NARRATOR

She opened the bottom drawer of her desk and pulled out a half-empty bottle of McCallan 12 and two small glasses. She poured a shot into each glass and handed him one.

ROCK

That bad huh?

NARRATOR

She nodded and held her glass up and drank in tribute; tribute to an innocence soon to be in the rear view mirror of the pickup truck of life.

MIKE

I'm just going to come right out and say this. Your instinct was right, Rock. Your husband is being unfaithful to you.

NARRATOR

He nodded with the resignation of a death-row inmate who knows that the Governor is never going to call.

MIKE

You're going to want to drink that, it gets worse.

NARRATOR

He drank, and she refilled his glass with another shot of courage.

ROCK

I'm a big boy, Mike. Don't sugar-coat it.

MIKE

You husband's lover is your brother, Roger Johnson.

ROCK (shocked)

Are you sure?

MIKE takes a large manila envelope out of a desk drawer

NARRATOR

She waved a manila envelope, knowing all the while he'd be unable to resist the temptation of looking inside.

ROCK

May I?

ROCK takes the envelope and opens it

ROCK (cont.)

Oh God. It's true, that's Roger all right. How...?

MIKE

I followed your tip about the hotel. Staked out the lobby after your husband left work. Saw him come in and tipped a willing desk clerk to get a room with a view across the courtyard into his room. When I saw the man who was with him, well, the resemblance to you was striking. (wistfully, forgetting Rock is in the room) The chiseled features, the athletic yet supple build, the eyes... oh God the eyes... (remembering where she is) Well, um, like I was saying, there was such a resemblance that I figured he was a close relative. So, I followed him home after the... well, after. The name on the mail box said Roger Johnson.

ROCK

Roger. (sadly) Betrayed by my own brother. We're fraternal, you know, two of three fraternal triplets. It's actually funny

you think he's handsome, he and I are the runts of the litter. It's our brother Rod who is the handsome one.

MIKE (as an aside)

Oh for love of all that's holy please tell me *he's* straight!

ROCK (distracted)

What?

MIKE

Nothing. Look, Rock. I'm sorry about all this. But, now at least you know.

ROCK

You're right. As hard as it is to hear, this is what I wanted. What I needed. I had to know the truth. Thank you Mike. And thanks for the drink.

ROCK exits

NARRATOR

And with that, he stood and walked out of her office. She turned toward the window to watch him as he stepped out onto the sidewalk. He flipped up the collar of his overcoat, pulled his hat down low, lit a cigarette, and walked off into the night. He became just another faceless stranger blending in with the passers-by, disappearing from her life as he disappeared into the crowd. But she knew he would be unable to join them in their cheer on this night, or for many lonely nights to come.

END OF PLAY