

THE PHOENIX LOTTERY

(Excerpt)

(EDGAR BEAMISH is dead. EMILY PRISTABLE, his devoted secretary, is alone on stage.)

EMILY. Edgar? Are you there? Edgar? If you're there please give me a sign? I want to see you. I need to see you. Please? You're still angry with me, aren't you? Why did you have to die angry with me? Why? You didn't let me explain. You didn't give me a chance to say I was sorry. You just died. You just died and I came in to work the next day with a new silk tie, the kind you liked, all giftwrapped with a card to say I was sorry, I didn't mean it, only they said you weren't coming in and you'd never be coming in again and I wouldn't be able to see you anymore. And I wouldn't be able to say I was sorry. And I hate you for leaving me like that. Dear God, Edgar, my last memory of you is of you sitting there with that hurt look in your eyes and me slamming the door. It isn't fair, dammit. It isn't fair. I loved you.

(The wingback chair swivels around, revealing BEAMISH.)

BEAMISH. Emily?

(IMPORTANT NOTE: Throughout the following scene, EMILY is never able to hear BEAMISH)

EMILY. You used to tease me. You called me a Baptist prude.

BEAMISH. I didn't mean any harm.

EMILY. Well maybe I don't wear dresses that leave nothing to the imagination. But I don't know many Baptist prudes who check into the Park Plaza with a married man. For twenty years, I lived in terror I'd bump into somebody from church or the bridge club. I'd go up the elevators and walk through the halls pretending to read the Globe and Mail.

BEAMISH. *(miming)* Two inches in front of your nose.

EMILY. You thought it was funny.

BEAMISH. It was.

EMILY. But I didn't think it was funny. It went against everything I believed. But inside those rooms... Those were the happiest days of my life.

BEAMISH. And mine.

EMILY. Of course, you were always in a hurry. The first time, I thought the cabby must be outside with the meter running. Heaven's to Betsy, I barely had time to turn out the lights before you let out a holler, rolled over and snored.

BEAMISH. Pardon?

EMILY. I didn't think it had happened. Except it hurt. I was convinced sex was like amnesia with a dentist.

BEAMISH. You're saying I was a bad lover?

EMILY. It was two years before I figured out what all the fuss was about.

BEAMISH. Why didn't you tell me?

EMILY. There was always so much you didn't want to know: How I was feeling. What I was thinking.

BEAMISH. That's not true.

EMILY. You'd say, "Is that all?" and turn on the T.V..

BEAMISH. Forgive me?

EMILY. I'll never forget the day I put my foot down. "I'm a Baptist, dammit. You make me feel like a two bit whore. It's her or me." And when you said you weren't going to divorce her, it tore me apart.

BEAMISH. I couldn't hurt her like that.

EMILY. You always hurt the ones you love. Shakespeare has nothing on The Mills Brothers.

BEAMISH. Please, try to understand.

EMILY. I'll never understand. After everything you said. After everything you promised. I stormed out of this office with you looking like a deer caught in the headlights.

BEAMISH. Jane was troubled. I couldn't push her over the edge.

EMILY. Jane had you wrapped around her little finger.

BEAMISH. She had all those pills, clinics and doctors.

EMILY. And I had God.

BEAMISH. Right.

EMILY. Which most people think is a joke. A crutch. But if it's a crutch, why kick it? I love my faith. But the Bible doesn't keep you warm at night. I'm sorry, God, but I am in pain and it isn't fair. He's dead. You killed him and it isn't fair.

BEAMISH. Emily.

(BEAMISH moves to comfort her but she moves away. It is as if she sensed his presence, but of course she can't.)

EMILY. I went to the funeral. You know that. And I sat in the back with the other employees. And no one suspected. Nobody knew.

BEAMISH. Jane knew.

EMILY. Jane said, "Oh yes, you're the secretary with the spelling problems, aren't you, dear? So glad you could come." I wanted to smack her. I wanted to shout, "Who do you think reminded the big lug about your anniversaries, you little toad? Who do you think bought your Christmas gifts?" I wanted to scream, "You don't know what it is to grieve. You put on a show with your big fake tears, but you're waving goodbye with a VISA card." I wanted to be cruel and ugly and horrible. I wanted her to feel the pain I felt. But mostly I wanted to hold you. I wanted to kiss you goodbye. But I couldn't. We were never alone. All I could do was straighten your tie when no one was looking. You were so fussy about your ties. And it was so crooked. I bet Jane did it for spite.

BEAMISH. She had enough cause.

EMILY. I miss you so much. I've tried to take care of Junior and keep him safe. He's a good boy. He loves you.

BEAMISH. Bullshit.

EMILY. I can just picture you, looking down at me from some cloud saying "Bullshit". You and your language. I'll bet you make Jesus blush.

BEAMISH. My son hates me.

EMILY. But he loves you, Edgar. I see him staring at your picture when he thinks no one's watching.

BEAMISH. You don't know my son.

EMILY. You don't know your son. You can't like yourself until you know who you are. And you can't know who you are when you're father is someone like you. He's just trying to break free, Edgar. That's all. He doesn't mean to hurt you. Good Lord, whiskey is a terrible thing. I'm babbling away and there's nobody here.

BEAMISH. I'm here.

EMILY. I'm alone. But I'm not complaining. I have a good life.

BEAMISH. I miss you, Emily.

EMILY. But I wish... I wish... Dear God, you've given me so much. But the one thing I want is the one thing I can't have. I want him. I want him.

(EMILY sinks to her knees and begins to cry)

BEAMISH. I'm here.

(BEAMISH moves behind her, sinks to his knees and holds her tenderly. She cannot feel it.)

EMILY. I want to feel him holding me.

BEAMISH. *(gently)* I'm here. I'm here.

EMILY. I want him not to be hurt. I want him not to be angry.

BEAMISH. I'm not.

EMILY. But I want him to know I'm a human being. I want him to know I feel and hurt and rage and hate and love. I miss him so desperately. Please God, please. Wherever you are, if you are -- Please let him know that I love him.

BEAMISH. I'm here. I know.

EMILY. Please let him know.

BEAMISH. I love you too.

(He holds her for as long as it takes. EMILY wipes her eyes and gets up as if he isn't there.)

EMILY. *(wiping her eyes; to herself)* Aren't you the proper fool. You've lived your life for daydreams.

BEAMISH. Emily?

EMILY. I'm an old boozier, that's what I am. As if anyone cares for a Baptist prude.

BEAMISH. I do. Emily? *(EMILY begins straightening the desk)* Emily?