

PERFECT CHOICES

By

Kenneth Goorabian

An Original Screenplay

INT.HOSPITAL-NIGHT

The cold December chill is instantly left behind as MATT PETERS (40's) hurries through the mechanical doors into the emergency room. The hospital is mostly deserted with only a few people seated in the brightly lit waiting area.

Matt strides up to the reception desk. A NURSE is entering information into a computer. She ignores him for a moment. He begins to tap nervously on the counter.

NURSE

Can I help you?

MATT

I got a call from the police. My wife was in a car accident. They said she was brought here.

NURSE

What's her name?

MATT

Janice. Janice Peters.

The nurse types into the computer.

NURSE

They're working on her now. If you could just have a seat.

MATT

Is she o.k.? They didn't tell me anything.

NURSE

I really can't say. It might be a while. Why don't you take a seat. I'll let the doctor know you're here.

MATT

Can you at least tell me if it's serious? Is she alive?

NURSE

I'm sorry. I don't have that information. I'll have the doctor come out and talk to you.

MATT

Thanks. Is there a cafeteria, or somewhere I can get a cup of coffee?

The nurse goes back to her typing.

NURSE

Down the hall to the left. Follow the signs.

MATT

If the doctor comes while I'm gone...

NURSE

I'll let him know where you are.

INT.CAFETERIA-NIGHT

The cafeteria is more deserted than the waiting area. Matt walks over and pours a cup of coffee, pays the cashier and looks around. An older couple are sitting in a corner talking quietly; the man's arm protectively around the fragile, stoop shouldered, gray haired woman.

A thin, red haired woman (30's) sits alone near the window, her face pale and drawn, eyes red and puffy, but quite lovely under the circumstances. She suddenly looks up and catches Matt staring. Embarrassed, he quickly turns and bumps the waist high, chrome rail and drops his cup.

MATT

Damn it.

The coffee splashes up his pant leg and spreads across the black and white checked linoleum floor. He covers his face with his hands.

A hand touches his shoulder. It's the red haired woman. Her name is EMILY KRAIG.

EMILY

Are you o.k.?

MATT

My wife's been in a car accident. I...

EMILY

No need to explain. How's she doing?

MATT

The nurse wouldn't give me any information. I don't know.

EMILY
 (To the cashier)
 I'm sorry. We've had a little
 accident.

CASHIER
 No worries. I'll have someone clean
 it up.

EMILY
 (To Matt)
 Why don't you go sit down. I'll get
 you another cup of coffee.

MATT
 That's not necessary.

EMILY
 I want to. It'll give me something
 to do. Go on now.

Emily gestures towards the table she was sitting at.

Matt hesitates for a moment. She gently takes his arm and
 guides him over to her table and makes him sit down.

EMILY
 Cream and sugar?

MATT
 Just black, please.

He watches Emily as she walks away. She moves gracefully
 like a dancer, each stride measured and purposeful;
 beautiful. She glances back at him and smiles as she pours
 the coffee. Time seems to stand still for Matt. The hospital
 sounds are suddenly replaced by an eerie, almost mystical
 silence. Even from twenty feet away he can see her pale
 cheeks, slightly flushed; the color nearly matching the
 fiery radiance of her shoulder length hair. Embarrassed once
 again, he quickly lowers his gaze.

A slender fingered hand places a white Styrofoam cup in
 front of him.

EMILY
 This ought to do the trick. Always
 does for me.

MATT
 Thank you. I'm sorry to be such a
 bother. I guess it finally hit me.

Emily takes a seat next to him.

EMILY

Don't be silly. I totally understand. It's nothing.

MATT

I'm sure you've got problems of your own. I'll be o.k..

He looks over at her. Tears well up in her eyes.

EMILY

(whispers)

My husband's dying.

MATT

I'm so sorry. Here you are taking care of me when...So there's no hope then?

EMILY

Nothing they can do. I've been sitting with him in ICU since seven this morning. I needed some fresh air. It's so hard to just watch someone die. I feel so helpless. I can't...

Suddenly she's in his arms, crying. Matt holds her until the sobbing subsides. She slowly pulls away and wipes her tears on her sleeve.

EMILY

I am so sorry. My God, I'm such a cry baby. I don't know what came over me. Please forgive me...eh...I don't even know your name.

MATT

Nothing to forgive. And my name is Matt. Matt Peters.

He holds out his hand. She grasps it firmly.

EMILY

Emily Kraig.

Their hands stay together longer than necessary.

MATT

Are you here alone? No family...friends?

Emily just shakes her head.

MATT

I hope you don't mind my asking,
but long have you been married?

EMILY

Two years next month. We met at
work. He was my boss.

MATT

Oh. I guess that's one way of
getting a little job security.

Matt smiles. She leans back, brushes the hair from her face
and laughs.

EMILY

The other girls at the office
didn't see it that way. Gold
digging little bimbo is what I
believe they referred to me as. But
it wasn't like that. We really were
in love. The age difference wasn't
an issue, at least to us.

MATT

What... was he like 18 or
something?

The smile that she gave Matt nearly left him speechless.

EMILY

Let's just say he was part of the
Woodstock generation.

MATT

As in "free love" and all that?

EMILY

A true hippie in every sense of the
word. Well, except he went on to
college and became a corporate
lawyer.

MATT

That kind of goes against the whole
hippie dogma doesn't it?

Emily smiles.

EMILY

I guess it does. But that was long
before we met.

MATT

Kids?

Matt takes a sip of his coffee.

EMILY

He has children from his first marriage. He's not interested in having any more.

MATT

And you're o.k. with that?

Emily's smile fades. She shrugs.

EMILY

I've come to accept it. Do you have any children?

MATT

Not yet. Maybe someday. My wife's career requires a lot of travel.

EMILY

What does she do?

MATT

She's an actress.

EMILY

Really? That's so cool.

MATT

For her, I guess. For me...

Matt shrugs.

Emily pulls her legs up and sits cross-legged across from him.

EMILY

Has she been in anything I would know?

MATT

Maybe. She's the goofy grocery check out lady in the Hendricks coffee commercials.

Emily's face lights up. She scoots in closer.

EMILY

You're kidding. I love that commercial. She must be a lot of fun to be around.

MATT

Let's just say she's definitely nothing like that woman in real life. Not even close.

EMILY

What's it like being married to a famous actress? Do you get to go to Hollywood parties and stuff?

MATT

She's not exactly famous. She's still waiting for her big break. And it's not as glamorous as it sounds. She gets up real early and comes home late...she's gone a lot.

EMILY

You must get lonely. My husband travels a lot too. I know how it is. Couldn't you go with her?

MATT

That life doesn't interest me in the slightest. If I had my way we'd be living in Idaho, or maybe Montana. A little cabin somewhere...

EMILY

I'll bet you're an artist, or a writer.

MATT

Guilty, I'm a painter.

EMILY

I knew it. Artists seem to have a kind of sensitivity about them. A sadness I guess. they all seem slightly out of place in this world. Are you famous?

Matt laughs.

MATT

Maybe after I die.

Emily's lowers her gaze.

MATT

I'm sorry. Bad joke. New subject.
What does Emily Kraig do to fill up
her life?

EMILY

I'm taking some college courses.
Bill, that's my husband, thinks
it's a waste of time, but I'd like
to go to medical school.

MATT

Why a waste of time?

EMILY

I change my mind a lot. He says I
don't follow through. And he
doesn't think I'm smart enough.

MATT

Your husband said that?

Emily ignores the question.

EMILY

I love to be a family doctor in
some small town where everybody
knows each other. I could make
house calls, deliver babies...I
know it sounds silly.

Matt takes her hands.

MATT

I don't think it's silly at all.
You'd make a great doctor. I'll be
your first patient.

Emily blushes.

EMILY

You ever wish you could go back in
time and start all over? You know,
make the right choices for a
change. The perfect choices?

MATT

Sure, all the time. Who hasn't. We
all make decisions that we regret
later. That's life.

Emily leans back and closes her eyes.

EMILY

I could be treating patients in the office. They'd pay me with chickens and home made jam; my husband's slaving away on his newest masterpiece in the old barn behind the house that he lovingly turned into a studio because the light is so perfect...the kids running around the yard laughing; the dog barking and chasing them through piles of autumn leaves...

Emily sighs heavily.

MATT

That sounds so wonderful. And thank you for including me in your fantasy.

Emily opens her eyes and looks Matt in the eyes.

EMILY

It could happen. Dreams sometimes come true, don't they? Why does it have to be a fantasy?

DR. EVERS- enters the room. He sees Matt and Emily and walks over.

DR. EVERS

Mr. Peters?

Matt stands up. They shake hands.

MATT

Is my wife all right?

DR. EVERS

Would you like to speak in private?

Matt looks back at Emily.

EMILY

I'll get a cup of coffee.

MATT

No, it's o.k.. She's a friend.

DR. EVERS

Well, your wife was in a major traffic accident, and she has a very serious head injury. Right now she's in a coma, and that's good.

MATT

That's good?

DR. EVERS

It's the best thing for her. She needs as little stimulus as possible at this point. Being in a coma allows for the least amount of stress on her brain.

MATT

What's the bottom line?

DR. EVERS

I don't want to paint an unrealistic picture of her chances. She's not out of the woods yet. She's in very critical condition. Right now it's a waiting game. She could come out of it two minutes from now, or it could be two years. I just don't know. She's breathing on her own without life support, which is a good sign. Would you like to see her?

MATT

Of course. Was she alone in the car?

DR. EVERS

I'm sorry, I thought you knew. There was a gentleman brought in with her.

The doctor looks at his notes.

DR. EVERS

A Mr. Kernin Greer. I'm sorry to say he died on the way to the hospital. Was he a close friend?

MATT

(coldly)

Not of mine.

He turns to Emily with desperation creeping into his voice.

MATT

You'll be here when I get back, right? You won't leave? You promise?

Emily smiles softly and nods.

EMILY

I'll be right here. I promise.

INT.INTENSIVE CARE-NIGHT

The room is dimly lit. Monitors of all types are blinking and beeping. A motionless, shadowy figure, swathed in bandages rests amidst an impressive tangle of tubes and wires.

Matt stands alone next to the bed.

MATT

(whispers)

You've really made a mess of things this time, haven't you? I guess I should be happy about your scumbag lover Kernin...shit, what difference does it make now. Remember when we were first married? You said you'd do anything to make me happy.

Matt just stares at the bed. He calmly reaches over and picks up a pillow from the chair next to the bed. He closes his eyes, gently places the pillow over her face and begins to apply steady pressure. Her struggle to live is short and ineffective.

Suddenly the silence is crushed by alarms and frantic voices outside the room. Matt tosses the pillow back onto the chair. Nurses rush in and begin shouting orders as others immediately go to work on her lifeless body. Someone grabs his arm and quickly ushers him out of the room.

INT.CAFETERIA-NIGHT

As Matt enters the cafeteria he sees another DOCTOR walking towards him. Emily is standing by the table crying. Matt stops the doctor.

MATT

What's going on?

DOCTOR

Are you a friend of the Kraig's?

MATT

Yes.

DOCTOR

I'm afraid it's bad news. Mr. Kraig passed away. We did everything we could...I'm sorry.

The doctor hurries out.

Matt rushes over to Emily. He touches her shoulder. She's instantly in his arms. Unable to stop himself he cradles her face in his hands and begins to kiss her tears away. She buries her face in his neck and sobs.

MATT

I'm so sorry I wasn't here for you. No one should have to go through that alone. Everything will be all right. I promise.

EMILY

I really thought I was ready for this. I guess I'm not superwoman after all.

MATT

Nonsense. It's a normal reaction. The death of a loved one isn't something you can prepare for. I wasn't.

Emily removes her arms from around Matt's neck and steps back. She wipes her tears with her hands.

EMILY

Your wife?

MATT

I'm afraid she's gone. They tried everything they could.

Matt shakes his head.

EMILY

Oh, God. I'm truly sorry, Matt. I'm sure you loved her very much.

Matt lowers his head.

MATT

There's no words to describe how I felt about her.

EMILY

This whole thing is so unreal. Do you believe in fate? It's as though we were supposed to meet? Like kismet. My mind is spinning. I'm sad, but happy. Happier than I've ever been. Am I a horrible person?

MATT

You are the most amazingly, wonderful woman I've ever met. I know exactly how you feel.

Emily is instantly back in his arms. They kiss as unashamed and passionate as two lovers reunited after a long separation.

EMILY

Take me somewhere... anywhere, it doesn't matter. There's too much death here. I want to live.

ONE YEAR LATER

IDAHO

INT.HOUSE-LATE AFTERNOON

The house is small, but cozy. A grove of trees can be seen through the modest picture window; the white lace curtains open wide to let in the last of the afternoon sunshine.

Emily is in the kitchen humming softly to herself as she dries the lunch dishes. Matt comes in the back door.

MATT

Shouldn't you be getting ready for school? Don't want to be late.

EMILY

I've got a few minutes.

Matt snuggles up behind her and wraps his arms around her waist.

EMILY

How's the painting coming?

MATT

In my modest opinion, I'd have to say your husband is one of the great undiscovered talents in the art world.

EMILY

Modest?

She turns and they embrace.

MATT

Have I told you lately how much I love you?

EMILY

Not nearly enough. But I still have a few minutes.

MATT

Have you reconsidered my request to sit for me, au natural?

Matt raises his eyebrows.

EMILY

Not on your life, Buster. That's for your eyes only.

MATT

Damn. I'm not giving up though. I'll wear you down eventually.

EMILY

Maybe when I'm eighty.

MATT

Ooo. That's not a pretty picture.

Emily slaps him on the head with the dishtowel.

Suddenly the doorbell rings.

MATT

I'll get it. Probably some beautiful young farm girl looking to have her portrait painted.

EMILY

In your dreams.

Matt dances over to the door and opens it.

MATT

Whatever you're selling, I'm buy...

Two burly DETECTIVES in suits with badges clipped to their pockets and TOM PULTY, the local sheriff are standing outside the screen door on the front porch. Matt's face goes pale.

TOM
I'm truly sorry to have to do this,
Matt. Really I am.

EMILY (OS)
Who is it, Honey?

MATT
(whispers)
I know why you're here. Can I have
a minute to say good-bye.

Emily is suddenly behind Matt in the doorway. She see's the
men. Her smile disappears.

DETECTIVE
We have a warrant for the arrest of
Mrs. Emily Peters for the first
degree murder of William Andrew
Kraig.

Matt turns to Emily, a look of complete surprise on his
face.

The three men enter the house and proceed to handcuff Emily.

EMILY
I'm so sorry, Matt. I just couldn't
take it anymore. You don't know
what it was like.

DETECTIVE
You have the right to remain
silent. Anything you say can be
used against you...

EMILY
I love you.

FADE OUT