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Dramatic Publishing

The Phoenix Dimension

A Full-length Play

by

KENT R. BROWN

Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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KENT R. BROWN

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(THE PHOENIX DIMENSION)

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THE PHOENIX DIMENSION was originally presented as a staged reading by the New Playwrights' Program at the University of Alabama on November 30, 1995. The reading was coordinated by Paul C. Castagno, Director of the NPP, and E. Bert Wallace, NPP Literary Assistant, in conjunction with the Department of Theatre and Dance. The cast was as follows:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Justin | Michael Carr |
| Veronica | Michelle M. Ladd |
| Mark | Paul C. Castagno |
| Gordon | Bruce Cohen |
| Brad | Neal Brasher |
| Liz | Holly E. McDonald |
| Mickey | E. Bert Wallace |

SOUND/MUSIC

The play includes numerous SOUND BITES interpreted from television and radio talk shows; news and variety programs; commercials and so on. The voices used should represent a range of regional and ethnic backgrounds. Telephone conversations should sound “electronic/magnified” even if the characters speaking are standing close to each other and/or are in full view of the audience. MUSIC BITES as well as product ads / station IDs / stock quotes / business news updates may be incorporated as needed. Segments may be cut to accommodate the pace of the production.

THE PHOENIX DIMENSION

A Full-length Play
For 5-7 Men and 2-5 Women

CHARACTERS

JUSTIN late 50s, single, an introverted but loyal
executive of depreciating value

VERONICA/FEMALE VOICE. elegant, seductive,
manipulative

MARK plays the role of corporate dictator with a thin
vener of good-humored benevolence

GORDON. one of the faceless millions in a three-piece suit
hoping to find a place at the trough

BRAD. another version of Gordon

LIZ a streamlined junior executive willing to take on
all comers

MICKEY bartender at the Tiger's Den
(doubles as POLICEMAN)

PEOPLE/PATRONS played by the actors doing SOUND BITES.
There should be a sense of speed, purpose, sterility, menace

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A city.

Multiple locations: bedroom, office, boardroom, bar, city streets, all requiring the barest details. Expressionistic in tone and intensity, the action should be played continuously.

THE PHOENIX DIMENSION

SCENE ONE

SETTING: *There is the sound of intermittent rain and thunder. The house fades to black. A telephone rings. We hear someone waking up.*

JUSTIN (*into his telephone*). Hello? Hum? Hello? Who is this? Hello? (*There is no reply. JUSTIN clicks off the telephone and rolls over. The rain continues. The telephone rings again. LIGHTS fade up as JUSTIN turns on the bedside lamp, fumbles for his glasses, looks at the time, and reaches for the telephone.*) Hello? Who is this?

FEMALE VOICE. Were you sleeping?

JUSTIN. What do you... who is this?

FEMALE VOICE. I woke you, didn't I? I'm sorry. (*Beat.*) Are you there?

JUSTIN. Who are you?

FEMALE VOICE. Don't hang up, please. Justin? That's your name, isn't it? (*Beat.*) It's raining and I'm frightened.

JUSTIN (*beat*). Did you call before?

FEMALE VOICE. Before? When?

JUSTIN. Just now. Before. A moment ago.

FEMALE VOICE. Yes. Yes, I did. I called before.

JUSTIN. I don't recognize your voice. I don't know you. Please hang up. You have the wrong number.

FEMALE VOICE. Please! I can't have the wrong—this is 737-6248? Am I correct? 737-6248?

JUSTIN. No, you're not correct.

FEMALE VOICE. Yes, I am! This is your number. Thank God you're there. (*Beat.*) Justin?

JUSTIN (*raises up in bed*). Have we met before? Do I know you? No, I don't think I know you.

FEMALE VOICE. We haven't met formally.

JUSTIN. I would have remembered your voice.

FEMALE VOICE. Yes, I know. A great number of people remember my voice.

JUSTIN. I must get some sleep. I'm sorry. Good night. (*JUSTIN prepares to hang up the telephone.*)

FEMALE VOICE. Don't hang up, please! You're still there, aren't you? Don't leave me! Not yet. Please.

JUSTIN. It's 4:37 in the morning.

FEMALE VOICE. I know, I'm sorry. (*Laughs.*) 4:37! That's so charming. You're very precise. Most people would have said "It's early" or "It's late." Do you like the rain, Justin?

JUSTIN. Is this a sex call?

FEMALE VOICE. Please.

JUSTIN (*feeling suddenly unprotected*). How do you know my name? And my number? How did you get my number?

FEMALE VOICE. I need your help!

JUSTIN. Good-bye.

FEMALE VOICE. I'll call back!

JUSTIN. I'll take the phone off the hook!

FEMALE VOICE. Please don't! I'm desperate. I need you. We need each other. You'll see.

JUSTIN. This isn't a crisis hot line. I can't help you. Now, I'm almost completely awake. I have got to get some sleep!

FEMALE VOICE. Are you alone, Justin?

JUSTIN. This has gone far—

FEMALE VOICE. It's so lonely, isn't it? Being alone.

JUSTIN. I'm not trained to help you, young lady. You do have the wrong—

FEMALE VOICE. Do you ever walk in the rain, Justin? Alone? At night. When no one is awake?

JUSTIN. No, I do not. Now, I've had about—

FEMALE VOICE. I do. Sometimes I let my robe slip from my shoulders. Then I walk down the stairs. Barefoot. And step into the rain. Naked. Do you ever want that, Justin? Just leave the world behind and be washed clean by the rain? Come, with me, Justin. Take my hand. Watch the rain with me. (*JUSTIN finds himself compelled by the woman's voice but does not move.*) You haven't moved. I can tell. But you want to. I can feel it. Just this once. For me. Please. Then I'll go. (*Hesitantly, and not quite aware of why he is reacting to her request, JUSTIN moves to the "window." The rain intensifies.*) I can hear the rain! You're there, aren't you? By the window.

JUSTIN. Yes. Now, please go.

FEMALE VOICE. Do you hear it falling?

JUSTIN. Yes, yes!

FEMALE VOICE. See how it streaks across the sky.

JUSTIN. Yes, I see the rain! Now, I don't know who you are and I'm sorry you can't sleep, but you said you would hang up the phone and go away!

FEMALE VOICE (*in a matter-of-fact tone, no longer seductive*). Are you prepared for the meeting this morning?

JUSTIN. The meeting? What meeting?

FEMALE VOICE. The meeting with Brad and Liz and Gordon and Mark, of course. The Phoenix Dimension meeting. At Digitron, Justin. Where you work.

JUSTIN. How do you know about the—?

FEMALE VOICE. Everything folded, and copied, and stapled and stamped?

JUSTIN. What is this, a trick of some kind? Did they tell you to find out my number and—?

FEMALE VOICE. A very important meeting, Justin. Be careful!

JUSTIN. Are you a spy? You're a spy, aren't you?

FEMALE VOICE. I can't talk anymore now.

JUSTIN. Who are you spying for? I'm changing this number immediately.

FEMALE VOICE. Help me, Justin, please, and I'll help you.

JUSTIN. You tell your—*(We hear her telephone click off. For a moment JUSTIN is motionless, unsettled, embarrassed yet aroused by what has transpired.)*

SCENE TWO

(As SOUND BITES begin, JUSTIN dresses himself in a conservative suit, shirt, tie, socks and shoes. As he dresses, and in several scenes to follow, JUSTIN selectively reexperiences portions of the conversation he has just completed with the FEMALE VOICE.)

...Later this morning researchers from the University of California, Berkeley will inject liver cells from a baby baboon into the thirteen survivors of the viral epidemic that swept through—

...During last night's charity performance of Verdi's *Othello*, Roberto Castellani stepped to the footlights, withdrew a pistol, and fired four shots into the audience before placing the weapon in his mouth and—

...It's so easy to fix and it's fun, too. You just pop it in the oven, keep it there all cozy and snug for thirty minutes at 375 degrees and bingo! All done! Your friends will say "This is delish!" And you'll feel soooo good, too. Just three cups of—

FEMALE VOICE. Are you alone, Justin? It's so lonely, isn't it? Being alone.

...Bob, have you bought that sweet thing of yours somethin' sweet for her birthday? "Not yet, Jerry, but when I do I'll skip on down to Bambi's Beatific Boutique and get a gift certificate for all those goodies Bambi has in her window. Hey, is this a joke? Beatific! Who wrote this copy!" If that's what it says then that's what it is, Bob. "You're pulling my chain again, Jerry." Yank, yank, big boy! Happy birthday! "Oh, no—"

FEMALE VOICE. Do you like the rain, Justin? How it feels on your body? Come, Justin, take my hand.

...Reports indicate the new Russian economic alignments with Europe will take several years to stabilize. In the meantime, the new democracy is creating a highly effective Russian Mafia which has been credited with twenty-three murders in the last seven months.—

...I don't give a damn what she says! I didn't slam her stupid face into the wall. It was an accident! Hey, look. It's simple economics. She don't do what I tell her to do, she's got to learn to listen up and think straight. That's all I'm saying, you got that?—

FEMALE VOICE. Don't leave me! Please, Justin! I need you.

SCENE THREE

(After JUSTIN completes dressing, he cleans his glasses, neatly folds his handkerchief, takes his briefcase and umbrella and exits the "bedroom" which recedes into the darkness. PEOPLE begin to appear on the "street" with cellular phones, headphones, dark glasses, umbrellas, rain-coats. Occasionally someone mutters something unintelligible. No one acknowledges anyone. SOUND and MUSIC BITES continue through the transition.)

...Folks, it's rain and more rain today. Oh, dear, but it is soggy out there! Wear your booties everybody. No let up in sight. Over to you, Bucky!—

...The Lakers lost the awesome skills of Wesley Jackson last night when four masked gunmen broke into Jackson's Laguna Beach home and shot Jackson and his wife twelve times before—

...David, I need a price check on Wilson's Super Tastie Twinkie Doos, sixteen ounce, and Barclay's Favorite Pickle Bits.—

...I loved him! I loved him! I loved him! I had to kill him!

...Traffic is moderate to light this morning, Ralph. But I tell you, it looks like a bunch of ants down there. I-275 Southbound is down to one lane due to the six-car pile up involving—

FEMALE VOICE. Be careful, Justin. The Phoenix Dimension! I need you!

...So mail it to P.O. Box 7499 and cross your fingers, folks! The Sweepstakes Sweetheart will call you the moment you win the whole enchilada!—

SCENE FOUR

(LIGHTS crossfade as PEOPLE exit and MARK appears in his “office” talking on the telephone while scanning his computer monitor. JUSTIN enters as the SOUND BITES begin to fade out.)

...Trading is moderate on the Big Board this morning. ...Waste International: down 2 3/8...Vidascope: down 1 1/4—

MARK *(into his telephone while waving “hello” to JUSTIN)*.

I want a thousand shares of Waste International, my friend. It moves to 68 I want another five thousand. And sell GM and Intel for me, will you? And get me a stranglehold on Bio-Comm while you’re at it. Thanks. My best to Dorothy. *(MARK hangs up the telephone. As he talks to JUSTIN he still focuses most of his attention on his monitor.)* Ho, ho, ho! Another day, another million, eh?

JUSTIN. Sorry I’m late. The traffic was—

MARK. Is it something out there or what? You feeling OK?

JUSTIN. Good, yes. I’m feeling quite—

MARK. Big meeting this morning. Need to be on our toes.

JUSTIN. I’m fine. It was the rain, that’s all.

MARK. All that thunder, eh?

JUSTIN. Couldn't sleep. But I'm fine. I would have been here on time but—

MARK. Hey, no big deal. (*As LIGHTS come up on a sterile desk, a computer monitor and one telephone, JUSTIN moves into his "office" space.*) Oh, yeah. Williamson called. I answered it for you. He wants you to contact Reynolds about the Cryo-Genetics contract. And Bubba said he was off to Boise or Billings or Birmingham, somewhere at the top of the alphabet chain. I can't believe I pay \$300,000 a year to someone named Bubba. (*Responding to his monitor.*) Oh, oh! Movement in the jungle! Those little oriental guys work like hell, don't they? Whoa! I've just bought cocoa beans in Brazil. Did I want cocoa beans from Brazil? I guess so. Oh, yeah, and a woman called for you.

JUSTIN. A woman?

MARK. Yeah, nice voice.

JUSTIN. Who was she? What did she want?

MARK. She asked if I walked naked in the rain last night and I said "No, I slept like a baby" and then she said "Justin, is this you?" and I had to tell her "No" again. I hate saying no to women especially when they talk naked, don't you? You got fresh stuff I don't know about, you old goat? (*JUSTIN's telephone begins to ring.*) Ho, ho! There she is again, Justin, calling for you. Come to me! Justin! I'm all soft and wet. I can't remember the last time I had an evening of soft and— (*Something catches MARK's attention on his computer monitor.*) Oh, oh, what do we have here, you little devil you? Well, answer it Justin! Don't keep me in suspense.

JUSTIN (*answers his telephone*). Hello? Yes?

FEMALE VOICE. Justin?

JUSTIN. Who is this?

FEMALE VOICE. You know who this is. (*LIGHTS begin to fade out on Mark's "office" which slips back into the darkness.*)

JUSTIN. You shouldn't have this number. It's classified.

FEMALE VOICE. It's a new age, Justin. Nothing's classified anymore. (*JUSTIN hangs up his telephone and begins to open his briefcase. The telephone rings again. JUSTIN hesitates, then answers it.*)

JUSTIN. You want our estimates, don't you? Our figures, our basis points. Go away. There's nothing here for you.

FEMALE VOICE. Did you see them going to work this morning, Justin? Like ants. And the looks on their faces! It's not safe anymore. Be careful. I want to help you. Look at their faces, Justin.

JUSTIN. I don't need your help, thank you. And right now I'm very busy. Please don't call again. I'll have the number changed by noon. Good-bye.

FEMALE VOICE. Did you think of me, Justin? Last night after I called? You did, didn't you?

JUSTIN. I don't think you're very healthy, that's what I think.

FEMALE VOICE (*laughing*). You're not supposed to say that to unidentified callers. Drives them mad. Don't you watch TV? (*Beat.*) The Phoenix Dimension, darling. Be careful.

JUSTIN. How do you know about the—? (*The telephone clicks off.*)

SCENE FIVE

(We are now in a "meeting." Several new faces arrive: GORDON, BRAD and LIZ. All are stylishly dressed. Several charts roll into view, perhaps a viewing screen that can be pulled down into place. We see a series of the usual

multicolored fiscal “pies” that dominate business meetings. JUSTIN hurriedly removes several manila folders from his briefcase and moves to the “meeting” where he distributes the folders as his “office” disappears. The ensuing conversation makes no immediate sense to outsiders, but everyone “inside the loop” comprehends the implications of what is being said or not said.)

GORDON. Henderson faxed in this morning.

LIZ. And?

GORDON. The account is full out.

BRAD. How the hell does he expect us to—

GORDON. He wants to deemphasize the placement variables.

LIZ. He’s an imbecile! We’ll be in total retreat!

(MARK enters the meeting.)

MARK. Good morning, everyone. *(General “good mornings” all around. MARK’s behavior will swing from “good ol’ boy” to “executioner” depending on his “read” of the situation.)* Let’s get to it, shall we, kiddies? Brad?

BRAD. Yes, sir?

MARK. You’re the new boy on the block. Care to lead off this morning?

BRAD *(nervously)*. Yes, sir, I’d like that very much.

MARK. Good answer, Brad.

BRAD. Thank you, sir. Our investment subsidiary, as best as I’m able to calculate, has another three, four years at its current exposure.

LIZ. What are you saying?

BRAD. If the expansion potential is compromised by 15% then—