Ms. Grey
Comedy/Drama

commissioned by Linda Morgan

Mian Azael
CAST OF CHARACTERS

WOMAN: Mid-to-late 50’s, beautiful, though unaware of her beauty and charm.

PRIEST: Male, Late-40’s, graying hair, distinguished, easily smitten and prone to love.

SYNTAX
As detailed in Writing Dialog for Scripts by Rib Davis.

Slash (/): Interruption; the point at which the next speech starts.

PLACE
Interior of a church.

TIME
Late afternoon.
ACT I
Scene I

Setting:
A confessional area. There's a simple divider with a screen that separates the priest from his penitent. At this church, penitents are encouraged to “Confess nary a shame!”; so, there's no drape for their privacy. The priest however, is cloistered somehow.

Shifting light suggests the PRIEST is available within the confessional; yet he remains unseen for most of the play.

The WOMAN enters the church from either the right or the left. Her inquisitive and shy demeanor reveals her lack of familiarity. She approaches the confessional with intrigue.

WOMAN
(to self) God, I’ve always wanted to do this.

PRIEST
Is this your first confession?

(WOMAN takes a deep breath then stands in her place.)

WOMAN
Yes... and, well, no. I’m not Christian.

(pause)
Will this be a problem? (beat) I did attend Catholic school for a couple of years if that helps...

PRIEST
No, please don’t worry. This house of worship welcomes all faiths to explore and seek. What troubles you, my child?
WOMAN

You’re nicer than I expected. I thought of seeking professional help, as they say, but for what? To blame the graves of my mother and father? (beat) I’m about to lose my best friend of 17 years over this... “It’s still cheating.” she says...

PRIEST

Have you committed adultery?

WOMAN

To her, yes... But I’ve been faithful— for over 35 years. I love him very much. There’s been no one else. He was my first, and only.

PRIEST

My child, I don’t understand. Why then does she accuse you so?

WOMAN

Because I collect men.

PRIEST

What do you mean?

WOMAN

(reminisces) Beautiful men. Witty men. Men with soft steady hands, like those of a surgeon. Men who delight my mind with their debates. Men with a voice that drum my heartbeat... south. (beat) But before you assume Father, let me be clear. I don’t pursue any of these men.

PRIEST

Then her accusation seems misplaced. Is your friend of a different faith?

WOMAN

No, she’s Christian. It’s also why I’m here... So you feel I haven’t done anything wrong?

PRIEST

Well, you’ll have to explain more. You had mentioned “collecting”, how and where?

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WOMAN

Chance. I’ll meet them in the most lackluster of places too. Grocery stores, gas stations, even hell. / You know, the post office.

PRIEST

Pardon??

Ahem.

WOMAN

Have you ever felt at peace there, Father?!

PRIEST

(sighs) You are right.

So, you chance upon these men in your everyday life, whom you never pursue, though do they ever pursue you? Giving you permission perhaps, to reciprocate their affection?

WOMAN

Beyond friendly banter, some have. As I said though, I don’t pursue— ever. (beat) But...

PRIEST

There’s always a “but”...

WOMAN

I collect these men for my fantasies...

PRIEST

(intrigued) Go on...

WOMAN

...when my husband and I make love.

(pause)

In the beginning I’d simply imagine him to be any one of these men; now, our love-making is my art. The nights I yearn for a surgeon, or like his touch, I massage my husband’s callused hands with oil, then ask him to massage my body with long, firm, sweeping strokes...
PRIEST
(Aroused; begins to breathe deeply.)

WOMAN
(Pause; WOMAN remains unaware of the effect she's beginning to have on the PRIEST.)

Ask him to direct me, position me...

PRIEST
As a surgeon would do...

WOMAN
As a surgeon... Once, I met a man whose was voice somewhere between Barry White and Gregory Peck—

PRIEST
(like Barry White) Oh, you mean like mine?

WOMAN
Definitely not. Neither my husband’s.

Except for the nights after our son’s swim meets. All that cheering and yelling, his voice comes so close to that gas station attendant. The one who lit me up hotter than my hot flashes with just three words and his baritone, “Fill ‘er up?” Yes, please. (beat) And when I close my eyes as my husband kisses me, his voice comes even closer... Yes, yes, please...

PRIEST
You know, the other day someone told me how I look like Gregory—

WOMAN
It was bitter cold, that’s why I drove into a full-service station. (breathless) How he served more than one need...

PRIEST
(suggestively) And what are your needs?

WOMAN
I’m lucky. I know I am. Most of mine have always been met...
PRIEST
I hear a “but” again...

WOMAN
...when I realized my husband could never meet them all — a best friend, a provider, a protector, a confidant, a lover, a charmer, a wit — I decided to fantasize...

PRIEST
Yes, please illustrate some more...

WOMAN
He was behind me—

PRIEST
I have a chance!

WOMAN
What??

PRIEST
(flustered) A chance to better determine your sins after this. (beat) Please, go on.

WOMAN
So I've sinned! My friend is right then?? (beat) 17 years of friendship gone because of one sin? Father, she’s like my—

PRIEST
I said determine, my child.

WOMAN
Oh. Okay...

I was approaching the revolving doors of the post office and sensed someone behind me.

PRIEST
(Long sigh from rejection.)
WOMAN

Those doors are such a pain. Well, with my weak arms. I stepped aside to let him enter before me, just so I could scurry in behind him. Of course, he was a gentleman. “Please, ladies first.” I said, “Thank you, even if I hate these doors!” Inside, he chimed “Me too.” then flashed a smile with his salt, “That's why I was letting you do all the work!”

I had to set him straight, “Well then, I'm glad I'm not your wife!”

PRIEST

(charmed, laughs) He deserved that! Do tell me more, my chi—(beat) my... dear.

WOMAN

It's no surprise how we met at the end of a snaking line, nor how I met a charmer in hell.

PRIEST

(whispers) Between you and me, I think they’re having more fun down there.

WOMAN

As much as I don’t want to use this phrase, he was my afternoon Turkish delight. Worldly and bookish, our back and forth tested time’s flight; yet I can barely remember the last time my husband and I talked instead of talking: When are you dropping off the car for repairs? What should we eat for dinner tonight? What time should the plumber come? Should we visit your mom this weekend? What about the summer? Where should we go? What should we do? What should we eat for dinner during our vacation which we haven’t planned for yet? (beat) It’s maddening.

PRIEST

God truly is the perfect companion. Oh, and dogs. Some cats. So, what else with this delight?

WOMAN

What do you mean? Our conversation ended when I was next in line.
PRIEST

Right, just double checking. Rules you know. And with your husband?

WOMAN

Father, how is a woman expected to make love to a man who has been hollering and booing at a TV screen for two hours — the players can’t hear him?! Of course I'm going to desire my Ottoman scholar in his place. (beat) Visions of my husband’s Neanderthal beginnings are so vivid in my mind. Only a steaming bath can erase them—

PRIEST

In another sense, a Turkish bath.

WOMAN

Exactly! And he has to join me, else it’ll be his ultimate loss no matter the final score. After the bath I always ask him to recite poems by Nazim Hikmet.

Have you ever heard of him? The Turkish poet?

PRIEST

Never. Do you know any by heart?

WOMAN

I do! A short one titled “Thinking Of You”.

Thinking of you is pretty, hopeful,

It is like listening to the most beautiful song

From the most beautiful voice on earth...

But hope is not enough for me anymore,

I don’t want to listen to songs any more,

I want to sing.

PRIEST V.O.

My, God.
WOMAN

I know.

(pause)

I don’t know how I would’ve felt had the scholar recited these lines to me, because when my husband does, it’s like... like...

PRIEST

You’re falling...

WOMAN

Yes, like you’re falling! Quickly down... on a roller-coaster! And the butterflies in your stomach are tickling, tickling up- and you have to scream, laugh, and yes, sing to let them out! (beat) Sometimes I do! (laughs) On roller coasters... My children were mortified when I took them to Disneyland.

(pause)

I guess it’s like falling in love with him all over again. (beat) But...

PRIEST

There it is...

WOMAN

Am I? When the words aren’t his and the poet who wrote them makes me think of the man who charmed me out of hell?

(pause)

Am I, Father? Cheating on my husband when I fall in love with him through these imagined men?

(extended pause)

Father??

PRIEST

Tell me, how often do you make love to your husband as your husband? Say, in a year.
WOMAN
I... I... I suppose it depends. Some years I would fall asleep crying every night, wondering what I was to him - if anything. Those years I would say 30% him, and 70% others... Lately, it’s been the opposite, thankfully.

PRIEST
(Sighs from compassion.)

WOMAN
If I were Christian, what would you tell me? That I’ve sinned?

PRIEST
(tenderly) My dear–

WOMAN
Father, if you pardon me, will she??

PRIEST
You’re not...

WOMAN
(Sighs; looks up in despair. She notices some writing above the screen.)
“Salvation belongs to you.”

PRIEST
Pardon?

WOMAN
“Salvation belongs to you.” Someone wrote it...

(Touches the writing on the divider.)
...above this screen. (beat) Which book is it from?

PRIEST
The true scripture is “Salvation belongs to the Lord”. It’s from the Book of Jonah.
WOMAN

(Still captivated by the writing; passes her fingers over it.)

This feels more like the truth. (beat) But... isn’t it funny? How we tend to look up when we’re desperate for help?

(She looks at the writing again. After a beat her cellphone rings. She gathers her purse then exits. Shortly after the PRIEST emerges from his cloister. He immediately turns to the direction where the WOMAN exited from. After a beat, he looks up then exits. End of play.)