

CHAPTER 6 – ANTONIA IN THE CONFESSION BOOTH.

25 03 2022 Friday. Antonia calls the church enquiring about confession times.

Antonia picks up the phone and calls St. Joseph Catholic Church in Manhattan.

A male voice answers.

“St Joseph’s.”

“Can you tell me when Confessions are heard at the church? I mean, when are the priests available?”

“This is a small church. We only have one priest available to hear confessions.”

“Would there a problem with too many people waiting?”

“No No.”

“What is his name?”

“That’s Father Joseph. Are you Italian yourself?”

“Yes. My name is Antonia.”

“You sounded you had a lovely Italian accent. He is too. He is known as Father Giuseppe with the Italian community.”

“He is on tomorrow.”

“Is there parking by the church. I haven’t been for a while and I need to make peace with the Lord.”

“You can come any time during the day. In the evenings he is out. Busy helping the homeless people. So he spends lots of time on the streets.”

“Okay I will be there about 2 in the afternoon tomorrow.”

“He starts at 2.30 in the afternoon. The Church welcomes you.”

“Thank you.”

Antonia puts the phone down. A little later Angelo walks in.

“What a day. I have so many fucken problems right now. My head is spinning and splitting.”

He reaches out for some tablets. Swallows them. Shoots upstairs and jumps straight in bed.

“Antonia, don’t call me for dinner. I am trying to sort out some problems on a big deal.”

“Another one?”

“Yeah. Another one. Good Night.”

“Asshole.”

*26 03 2022 Saturday. Chapter 6 Section
Break*

Antonia goes to First Confession.

Antonia walks in the church at 2 pm, on the dot. Two more people were in the church. An old man and a young woman. Both looked like they were in for confession.

Father Giuseppe walks in from outside and heads straight to the confession booth. He walked by and acknowledged the congregation of three. He was wearing a full cassock and collar.

The old man was first. He spent about 10 minutes. He was hard of hearing because you could hear every imaginary discretion that he had committed.

The padre had to speak louder than usual for obvious reasons. Yet his voice, intonation and imagined demeanor sounded very refreshing to what she was used to hear at home.

But in reality her eyes were fixed on the young lady, dressed in very appropriate attire for the occasion. Redeemed of his sins the old man walked away from the booth, knelt, crossed himself and walked past Antonia, and made a gentle bowing of the head.

But all the while Antonia’s eyes were fixed on the other person. Father Giuseppe looked out of the booth and nodded at the young lady at the same time glancing at Antonia with a smile ... an innocent smile she thought.

The young lady, maybe 30, stood up and walked to the confession booth, elegantly and with a lot of pose. She was wearing a veil which was not very popular these days with women but seemed to fit the young lady very fashionably.

Antonia was trying to figure out what she had to confess. She was there for twenty minutes or so. What would her sins be! Why would it take so long to confess!

Once finished, she got up, crossed herself, and walked out with a seemingly angelic expression on her face.

But first she looked at the altar genuflecting towards the tabernacle but in full view of Father Giuseppe. She certainly looked very, very modern. Perfect clothes fitting a perfect shape.

Antonia was not sure if she was feeling jealous, anxious, nervous or what. After all, she intended to come to talk to a priest in place of a psychologist and mentor for a short while. Except, one kneels in church instead of relaxing on a couch. One listens to the word of the Lord instead of the mumbo jumbo ramble churned out by these so called mental professionals.

Antonia was kneeling when the priest motioned to her. She stood up and walked to the booth. Father Giuseppe recites in Latin.

“In nomine Patris et Filiis et Spiritus Sancti. May the peace of the Lord be with you.”

“Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been a very long time since my last confession.”

“Welcome to our church. My name is Father Giuseppe. What should I call you?”

“Antonia.”

“That sounds very Italian. Beautiful Name. My mother was named Antonia too. So tell me what brings back to the house of the Lord. I think it’s the first time I am seeing you.”

“That is correct. I have been struggling with my conscience for a while. I am trying to find some peace of mind.”

“Tell me Antonia what is troubling you.”

“I do not know where to start.”

“At the beginning but I can help you.”

“Many people make a big thing about their sins or indiscretions. They find peace after leaving the confession box ... for a while at least.”

“I see.” She pauses.

“When is the last time you have been to confession Antonia?”

“Quite a while. Maybe 10 years. Father.”

“Nothing to be ashamed of. Many people are like that these days. The days of television, computers, parties and the good life ... as they see it ... have taken over our life. A new world that my mother and father, and your parents will not understand if they were alive.”

“Very true. My parents have passed. Are yours alive?”

“No. My father passed when I was a boy. My mum about a year ago. I lived with her till then. Now I have to look after myself. As you can see this is a very small church.”

“Sorry to hear that. A little sad.”

“Not at all. We all have to pass through that narrow gate. And carry our own cross. Nothing much we can do about it now.”

“I see.”

“But it’s good to see that many young people like yourself still believe in the word of the Lord. Peace and solace is what we try to pass on. Sometimes we succeed. Sometimes we have to try harder. Sometimes we fail.”

“I am feeling very comfortable talking to you. I was very nervous before we started.”

“I am not here to listen to mortal sins, and venial sins, sins of lust and other misdemeanours. I am here to provide a lending ear to those who are looking to relieve any mental stress they may have. But of course I am here to listen to any indiscretions they may have committed in the past.”

“I see.”

“Do you find this discourse boring Antonia? Or is it something that you expected? Our interaction with our flock has changed a lot.”

“Oh it’s fine. I find your words very reassuring and your voice very soothing. (She catches her breath). When we went to confession many years ago, we used to say things – I disobeyed my father. I disobeyed my mother. I was cruel to my brother and sister. I looked at some paintings in the church which were naked and I felt ashamed. I had lust in my heart.”

Father Giuseppe chuckles.

“Am I making sense? Of course in those days I was much younger, immature and naive and driven by different desires.”

“Can I tell you what I think.”

“But of course Father, please.”

“I think you are not ready to confess something that is on your mind. I suggest, you go home and see if you feel more peaceful. If so, you are very welcome to see me in this confession box again. Maybe Wednesday? I will do my best to provide any guidance in the name of the Lord.”

“Yes. Wednesday is fine.”

“Also it may be interesting to know I have to leave early today. There are many homeless souls waiting for me on the streets. They get comforted by somebody like myself talking to them. So I let you go in peace. In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost.”

“Amen.”

Antonia crosses herself, gets up and leaves forgetting to bow towards the altar. Oops she missed a chance of Father Giuseppe catching a better glimpse of her, the same way he did for the other young lady before her.

She felt a certain amount of serenity and bewilderment.

Her thoughts were at home. She wondered what Angelo was up to in his Canali shirts, YSL underpants and Hugo Boss perfume.

She enters home. All Quiet. Angelo was not home as yet. The atmosphere seemed already different. It felt more serene. She wondered how long this feeling would last. In reality nothing had changed.

She will give it a week and visit the Church again. Looks at the Diary and enters 2 pm on Wednesday the 30 March.

30 03 2022 Wednesday. Chapter 6
Section Break

*Antonia gives a full Confession to Father
Giuseppe ... in his own house.*

She started seeing Father Giuseppe, carrying food for him in the back of her black Mercedes car and assisting him in distributing it to the homeless.

On her second time assisting him with food distribution he asked her to drop him at home and invited her upstairs. She gladly accepted.

He was feeling hot and sweaty moving and talking to people and handing out meals, cookies, fruit, and hot soups for two hours on the trot. All this in the humid New York air.

As soon as they went upstairs he asked her to make herself comfortable. Some religious books consistent with his vocation were lying around.

Antonia went to great lengths to prepare all the goodies. But while he walked the pavements, she stayed in the car with the air-conditioning going at full blast admiring his charitable work from the comfort within.

Antonia was still smelling terrific with her Chanel perfume. Even though the perfume was not at its peak as she would have liked, she thought asking to use the shower was a bit too forward.

Father Giuseppe came out in his dressing gown. He did not look anything like a shepherd of the Lord. He smelt good, freshly shaven. She thought he was ready serve the Lord in different ways.

That smell of aftershave smelt distinctly different from that of Father Anselmo's.

Father Anselmo was the local parish priest from her native Naples. Always sweating like a bull. And smelt like one too. In the church one would not feel the presence of the Lord. But certainly that of Father Anselmo. That smell was still in her nostrils from 45 years ago. Father

Anselmo used to say “The Lord always comes first”. ... Hygiene must have come a distant 100.

Still in his robe, Antonia got to her feet. She walked to Father Giuseppe and reached out. Giuseppe did not object. He led himself into her arms as if he himself was receiving the Lord.

His robe came off with one gentle tag. He started to undress her.

In no time they were united in one act. One might call it ‘Act One’.

Antonia looked at him with sadness and happiness in her eyes that only her words could describe.

“Giuseppe, as you can see, as humans, we are both fallible and thus sinners, yet we still can make it to Heaven. Because that’s where you have just taken me.”

“Antonia my child, you are right. But I suspect that your conscience is troubling you. You have sinned and I have sinned. Irrespective, I am happy to hear your confession.”

Still both sitting on the edge of the bed and with no clothes on, they discussed the Sacrament of Confession. And indeed if it were acceptable in the eyes of the Lord under the present circumstances. Father Giuseppe seemed to be tongue-tied and struggled to clarify his thoughts.

Antonia did not seem keen to be persuaded otherwise. She seemed to be willing to succumb to the temptations of the flesh. And a full confession will follow afterwards. Two for the price of one.

That reminded her when she was a child, and used to answer her mother back several times a day. She preferred to unload all her transgressions in one sitting, on the Saturday and late in the evening thus keeping a clean sheet for the Sunday service.

Both were still naked. Giuseppe asked her to knell down. He felt they had to confess very urgently in case they pass out with excitement and their souls could be lost forever. Antonia nodded three times.

Father Giuseppe started. "In nomine Patris et Filiis et Spiritus Sancti. May the peace of the Lord be with you."

"Bless me Father, for I have sinned. Again and again and again."

Antonia crossed herself. At the same time however, being very careful and extremely precise to synchronize her uttered words with the exact positioning of her right hand. Her forehead first, then her stomach, then the Holy Ghost with her hand gently placed on her left nipple. And with equal gentleness placing it on the right one when she uttered 'Amen'. But this time the hand lingered in that position for a few more seconds.

Father Giuseppe started sweating like Father Anselmo did many years ago. But he was still smelling terrific and certainly looking very, very, very fresh. Hence his offering.

Then Antonia gently bent forward, head down and Father Giuseppe raised his eyes towards Heaven. He kept them closed for the next five minutes while Antonia's head was down as if out of respect and asking for forgiveness. But she was not praying.

She thought that this might rightly be called 'Act Two'.

The Act Completed. It was as painless and relieving as the sense you get from confession in the Church, and equally comforting.

She asked when the next homeless run was due and he replied in two days' time. That would give her enough time to prepare food, hot soups and cookies.

A few extra cookies she thought for Giuseppe perhaps. For certain, that would keep his memories alive. After all, he seemed to munch on them with gusto.
