

Two Excerpts from

THE ADJUSTMENT

A Play By

Mike Folie

Representative:

GRAHAM AGENCY
311 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

Earl Graham (212) 489-7730

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Excerpt No. 1

Hard-charging Lobbyist Sharon Gray sees a chiropractor for the pain and tension in her neck. She doesn't want to be there – her assistant made the appointment for her.

SHARON

I'm looking for Dr. Boynton's office?

MATT

Come on in.

SHARON

Are you Dr. Boynton?

MATT

Dr. Boynton retired.

SHARON

But I have an appointment with Dr. Boynton.

MATT

He's in Florida.

SHARON

Oh. Well that does make it less convenient.

MATT

I'm Doctor Matthew Cohen. Are you Mrs. Gray?

SHARON

(To the audience.)

Doctor Matthew Cohen's right hand was shaking. He saw me looking and stuck it behind his back.

(To MATT)

That's "Ms. Gray." And your receptionist should have told my assistant Dr. Boynton isn't here (anymore.)

MATT

That was . . . that was my wife. She tries to run the business from our home and take care of two little kids at (the same time.)

SHARON

Spare me. Why is your hand shaking?

MATT

I have Parkinson's Disease.

SHARON

How can you (be a chiropractor with Parkinson's Disease?)

MATT

It's not a problem. Really. When my hand is anchored to something, the tremor doesn't . . . Look, I'll show you. See?

(HE puts HIS hand on HER shoulder. SHE recoils.)

SHARON

Hey! Whataya think you're doing!?

MATT

I'm sorry. I just wanted to . . .it's not contagious (and the tremor doesn't . . .)

SHARON

(Starting to leave)

Yeah, well, don't take this personal. It's not your . . . your disability. Really. I'm just not sure this, uh, this chiropractic stuff, this kinda alternative medicine is for me. You know what I'm saying? - Ow!

MATT

You're in pain.

SHARON

Damn!

MATT

Please. Let me . . . Just relax. I can help.

(SHE allows HIM to examine HER neck. Silence for a few seconds while HE probes the muscles and bones in HER neck with both hands. HIS concentration is intense. SHE relaxes under HIS professional touch.)

SHARON

You're right.

MATT

(Lost in HIS exam)

Hm?

SHARON

When you touched me. Your hand stopped shaking.

(HE removes HIS hands from HER and the right one begins to shake slightly again.)

MATT

Let me give you an exam. No charge. I'll only charge you for the adjustment.

SHARON

The adjustment?

MATT

If I do one. And I'll only do one if I think it will help.

(Pause)

I can do something about that pain, Ms. Gray.

(Slight pause)

SHARON

The state says it's okay for you to practice with Parkinson's Disease?

(HE nods.)

I'm a personal friend of Dr. Peter Hammond, the chief medical officer for this state, (and if you . . .)

MATT

I graduated third in my class.

SHARON

How many were in the class? Four?

MATT

Four hundred.

SHARON

And this was after you got Parkinson's Disease?

MATT

Oh, yeah.

SHARON

I thought only old people got (Parkinson's . . .)

MATT

You thought wrong.

(Slight pause)

SHARON

Well, good for you! You don't wanna be a victim. I admire that. You know the handicapped law in this city? I helped get that law passed.

MATT

Good for you. Would you take your top off, please?

SHARON

Why isn't there anyone else here? A receptionist?

MATT

I'm, uh, between receptionists at the moment. You can change in here. Hang your top on this, and put this on.

(MATT shows HER to the exam area, waits in the office area while SHE changes.)

SHARON

(To audience, as SHE removes top, hangs it up and puts on gown)
I guess gettin' half undressed with nobody else there was pretty stupid. But this was years ago, before all this sexual harassment stuff got goin'. Lemme tell you something, that kinda stuff doesn't happen to me. Never did. Fifteen, twenty years of dealing with the worst political dreck of this city, I mean guys that are barely human, and nobody's ever laid a hand on me. Not once. And I'm not exactly ugly, you know.

(SHE enters the exam area.)

MATT

Ready? On the table, please, face down.

(SHE lies face down on the table. MATT examines HER neck, probes HER shoulders and spine.)

MATT (CONT.)

You're tight.

SHARON

No shit, Sherlock.

MATT

On your back, please. How long have you been like this?

SHARON

Tense? All of my life. Ow!

MATT

Sorry. I'll bet you talk on the telephone a lot.

SHARON

I'm a political lobbyist, Dr. Cohen. I live on the telephone.

MATT

Try switching hands when you hold the phone. Now, take a deep breath in.

SHARON

What are you going to do?

MATT

Just relax.

SHARON

Are you going to do something? Don't hurt me.

MATT

Deep breath in. Breathe out.

(SHE does. On the exhale HE twists HER head suddenly and forcefully.)

SHARON

OhmyGod! Agggggghhhhh!

MATT

How does that feel now?

SHARON

(Sitting up on the table)

Oh, my God. It's gone. The pain is gone. I can move my neck! That's . . . that's fantastic! What did you do?

MATT

Chiropractic is about balance, Ms. Gray. Just like life. You get out of balance, it causes pain. My job is to keep you in balance.

SHARON

(To audience)

What a rap this guy had! He wasn't too bad looking either, for a guy with a shaky hand.

MATT

(Examining HER back with HIS hands)

You have a slight scoliosis of the middle spine. Not too bad, but it contributes to the problem in your neck. I think it's important we keep your spine moving.

SHARON

You mean I have to come back?

MATT

I think you should see me at least once a week for a while. You can get dressed now.

(MATT leaves the examination area and waits just outside of it.)

SHARON

How much will all this cost?

MATT

You have insurance?

SHARON

Omnicare.

MATT

Oh, they won't pay.

SHARON

My doctor ran up two thousand dollars in tests! They paid for that.

MATT

My usual fee is forty dollars a visit. But insurance only reimburses me twenty of that. If you agree to pay me twenty-five dollars cash each time you come, we can call it square.

(SHARON, dressed now, leaves exam area to join MATT.)

SHARON

I get it. So you can cheat on your income tax.

MATT

I declare all of my income, Ms. Gray.

SHARON

Sure you do.

MATT

My religious beliefs forbid me from lying on my tax return.

SHARON

What, Jews can't lie? Since when?

MATT

Not if they're members of my temple.

SHARON

What're you, Orthodox?

MATT

Sort of. You're Jewish, aren't you?

SHARON

Sort of. Here. Twenty dollars. Take it or leave it.

MATT

Excuse me?

SHARON

That's what you get for telling the truth.

MATT

Okay. But for twenty dollars you have to promise to come in once a week. You show up four weeks from now in pain, I charge you fifty dollars.

SHARON

That's a deal, Doctor Cohen. See you next week.

MATT

You want to make an appointment?

SHARON

My girl will call your girl.

MATT

Huh?

SHARON

My assistant will make an appointment with your wife next week.

(Pause. SHE has something else to say)

Y'know Sol Stern, the City Councilman? He's Orthodox. And he's helped me out once or twice. What I'm saying is, he knows how to play the game.

MATT

Yes?

SHARON

And I'll tell you something else, Dr. Cohen - Councilman Sol Stern lies. I've heard him.

MATT

See you next week, Ms. Gray. Remember what I said about the telephone. And try not to get so tense.

(Lights down on MATT. SHARON addresses the audience.)

SHARON

Hah! Easy for him to say. He doesn't spend his life dealing with the Sol Sterns of this city.

Excerpt No. 2

After using her influence to ensure that Matt is at the same political conference she is attending out of town, Sharon lures him to her room on a ruse. But when the knock comes at the door it isn't Matt – it's City Council President Machado – a long-time colleague – who has come to do a little political horse trading.

SHARON

Come in.

(SHARON drapes HERSELF on the bed and pretends to be in great pain. Enter EDDIE MACHADO, City Council Majority Leader. In the low light, SHARON, deep in HER performance, cannot see that it is not MATT)

SHARON (CONT.)

Oh, Matthew, I'm so sorry. I promised myself I wouldn't bother you. But the pain in my neck, it just got so bad . .

MACHADO

You're the pain in the neck, Gray.

SHARON

Eddie! What are you doing here?!

MACHADO

You said you wanted to talk. Who the hell is Matthew?

SHARON

None of your business.

MACHADO

So I guess you and Peter Hammond are no longer . . . ?

SHARON

That's old news, Eddie.

MACHADO

He's here, y'know? At the conference. Dr. Hammond. He and his lovely wife. I guess she took him back, huh?

SHARON

You didn't come here to talk about Peter, Eddie.

MACHADO

We don't have to talk at all. The answer is "no." G'night.

SHARON

You don't even know what I'm going to ask!

MACHADO

You want me to vote for Harold Tanner's Westside monstrosity. No.

SHARON

Eddie! Wait. Tomorrow. In the morning. At breakfast. When the world is new and bright again with the dawn. We can (talk then.)

MACHADO

I'm chairing a panel tomorrow at breakfast. "Inner-City Youth and the Corporate Culture of Indifference."

SHARON

Ooooooh! Snappy title. Whataya think you're gonna do, shake down the big corporations? For youth programs?!

MACHADO

You got a better idea? City's broke. The state's dry as a bone. You got anything to drink in here?

SHARON

Over there.

(MACHADO checks out the bar.)

MACHADO

Why don't you come to this breakfast tomorrow? You know all these corporate guys.

SHARON

Will you vote for Westside if I do?

MACHADO

Who do I look like to you, Bargain Bill? Hey! Twelve year-old scotch!

SHARON

Help yourself.

MACHADO

Yessirree. Ol' Sharon Gray knows where the big money is, don't you, Sharon?

SHARON

Get real, Eddie! Why would I use up my corporate chits for something that does not (benefit me in the least?)

MACHADO

Because it's not about chits! It's about kids. Kids whose lives are going down the toilet if somebody doesn't help them.

SHARON

Spare me. Those people don't vote. They don't have any money and they don't have any clout. They're victims.

MACHADO

These kids know how to get their hands on guns and cars. When they start showing up in your neighborhood, maybe you'll be the victim.

SHARON

Not a chance, Eddie. In my neighborhood we got tanks and F-fourteen fighter jets.

MACHADO

You are some piece of work, man.

SHARON

Come on, Eddie. We'll have lunch tomorrow and talk about Westside. There are ramifications to this deal you might not be fully aware of.

MACHADO

I'm fully aware it's going to put three thousand families on the street so Tanner can build a three hundred-unit luxury co-op and shopping mall.

SHARON

It's not even in your district.

MACHADO

I care about all the poor people in our city, Sharon.

SHARON

Except poor Harold Tanner.

MACHADO

Thanks for the drink. I'd better go. You've got company coming.

SHARON

Maybe you haven't heard about the cable franchise, Eddie.

MACHADO

Oh, Sharon! I know all about your little FCC scam. You're not going to do a damn thing to steer that franchise one way or the other. You're too smart for that.

SHARON

So what are you doing here then?

MACHADO

Excellent scotch. May I?

(Pours HIMSELF another drink.)

SHARON

I don't really need your vote, you know.

MACHADO

But my vote will clinch it for you, won't it? I got a reputation for honesty and integrity.

SHARON

Yeah. How did you ever manage that?

MACHADO

I'm honest, and I have integrity. If I vote for Westside it'll give a lotta other guys cover to do the same. Save you the trouble of wining and dining twenty different mopes all trying to look down your dress. You could spend the rest of this conference making whoopee with Matthew, whoever he is.

SHARON

What do you want?

MACHADO

Ten percent of whatever you're getting from Tanner.

SHARON

I knew it! "I'm honest! I have integrity!"

MACHADO

Now wait a minute. Not for me. Ten percent of whatever you're getting from Tanner - which I figure to be about ten mil - for inner-city youth programs.

SHARON

I don't get it.

MACHADO

You don't have any kids.

SHARON

I might yet.

MACHADO

Aw, you're too old. I got eight.

SHARON

Plus four!

MACHADO

Hey! I supported them all, didn't I?

SHARON

Saint Eddie.

MACHADO

I'm no saint. But we're not put on this earth to stuff our faces, stick it in everywhere. When you got kids, you think about the future. About the judgment of the future. All kids become your kids.

SHARON

Excuse me? This doesn't sound like the Eddie Machado I know.

MACHADO

I been seeing things a little different lately.

SHARON

Ten percent is way too much Eddie. How about three?

MACHADO

I got cancer.

(Long pause. Externally, SHARON doesn't move or blink; HER poker face remains inscrutable. Finally)

SHARON

Ten percent is still too much. Let's say five.

MACHADO

Let's say ten. What are you gonna buy with all this money, Sharon? More tanks? More F-fourteens?

SHARON

Both my parents died of cancer.

MACHADO

Ah, everybody dies of something. Ten percent. We got a deal?

SHARON

Seven and a half percent. When did you find out, Eddie?

MACHADO

Last month. Ten percent.

SHARON

Can't they . . . ?

MACHADO

It's in my liver, Sharon. I won't see Christmas.

(Pause)

SHARON

Damn you! Damn you! Damn you! Okay! Ten percent for Eddie's kids. If you guarantee the entire minority block.

MACHADO

I guarantee enough votes to get it passed.

SHARON

And if you're not dead in six months, I'll kill you myself.

MACHADO

You're getting soft in your old age, Gray.

SHARON

How do you wanna do this? You need me to sign a contribution pledge - something?

MACHADO

Nah. Everybody knows Sharon Gray don't lie.

SHARON

What did you say?

MACHADO

I said "everybody knows Sharon Gray don't lie." You say you're gonna do a thing, you do it.

SHARON

Of course I lie! I . . . I lie all the time!

MACHADO

I don't know what you tell your boyfriends like Matthew. But you never lied to me and you never lied to anybody else I know about. I think the only person you ever lie to, Sharon, is yourself.

(There is a knock on the door. MACHADO finishes HIS drink and goes to open the door, admitting MATT. MATT is dressed well and looks very good. HE is not wearing HIS yarmulke. HIS tremor seems to be gone completely.)

MACHADO

You Matthew?

MATT

Dr. Cohen. Are you in pain?

MACHADO

(Showing empty scotch glass)

Not any more.

(MATT sees SHARON. HE doesn't seem all that surprised.)

MATT

Sharon.

SHARON

Matthew. You look . . . beautiful!

MACHADO

On that note . . .

(HE puts down the scotch glass, start to go)

You know, Sharon, if you really were the hard-assed, selfish bitch you pretend to be, you wouldn't have to work at it so damn hard. G'night, kids.