



GOD

The Great
Screenwriter
of Our Lives

By Lisa A. Rice

I've always believed that God enjoys high drama. Every book in the Bible proves His love for a good story. I just didn't know He had such an amazing play written for me.

Back in November, I was sitting in a coffee shop with my good friend, Cheryl, lamenting over the fact that I had just written a bunch of articles about people who were seeing God's restoration and the fulfillment of their dreams, but that I hadn't seen mine fulfilled yet. Yes, I was having a pathetic little pity party.

It had been almost ten years since I

had sat in a Bible Study Fellowship class in Dunwoody, Georgia and had heard the unbelievable account of the slave-trader-turned-abolitionist, John Newton, who had written "Amazing Grace." On that day, I had *really* thought I heard God say that I, along with my husband, Eric, should turn that story into a screenplay. We did so, and though it got attention—and even offers from agents, networks and producers—for various reasons the chemistry just hadn't been right. Eric and I were trusting God for a like-minded producer who would truly share our

vision and leave the spiritual elements of the script intact.

As Cheryl took a deep breath and began to encourage me in the Lord (Aren't true friends awesome?), I noticed I had missed a call. As I listened to the message, I'm sure my eyes were as big as saucers. Here's what the message said: "Hello. My name is Mark Koch. I'm a movie producer interested in speaking with you about a screenplay. If this is the same Lisa and Eric Rice who wrote a script called "The Heart of a Man," please call me back at this number... I've been searching for

Photograph by Robin Nelson

you for over two years.”

After Cheryl revived me, I sat by the fire in a momentary trance, wondering if this could be real. Surely it wasn't a joke from a cruel friend? And if it was real, what could it mean? And who was Mark Koch? I sat for a moment, relishing the idea that someone had been searching for me for years. Words can't describe how that feels.

Two Weeks Earlier...

I found out that two weeks earlier, producer Mark Koch had been sitting in his office (the walls of which are lined with movies he had produced such as “Lost in Space,” “Black Dog” and “Judicial Consent”) with “Narnia” producer, Michael Flaherty. The two men were shooting the breeze and talking about their faith, their desire to make Kingdom-advancing movies, and their upcoming projects.

Michael told Mark that he was currently filming a movie about the British parliamentarian, William Wilberforce, who had been instrumental in getting slavery abolished. “You're kidding!” Mark said. I want to make the prequel to that movie—the story of John Newton!”

Mark pointed to a screenplay setting on his shelf and said, “I have the perfect script, but I can't option it because I don't know who wrote it. Someone removed the front page with the authors' names. All I know is that it was written by an Atlanta couple. I've put ads in the Atlanta Journal, and I've even had the eleven o'clock news make an announcement. I just can't find them.”

Michael got a strange look on his face and took the script. He glanced at it and looked up at Mark, smiling. “I know who wrote this,” he said. “It's a woman in Atlanta named Lisa. She interviewed me a few months ago.”

At that, Mark jumped up and grabbed Michael. “Atlanta? That's it! That's it!”

“Call my office on Monday, and I'll get you the number,” Michael said, as he peeled Mark's fingers off his collar.

Four Weeks Later...

Four weeks later, Mark and Stephanie Koch sat with Eric and me, dining in a wonderfully frou frou French restaurant at the famous Breaker's

Hotel in Palm Beach, sharing and comparing stories and talking about the script. Mark shared his vision for the movie—including an impressive lineup of A-list players, such as a top director, co-producer and stars.

Mark had recently formed a partnership with Peter Guber (Columbia Pictures, Casablanca Records, Sony Pictures, Mandalay Pictures) called Mandalay-Prelude Faith-Based Films. Their goal: to produce quality, redemptive family films that will impact and inspire the masses. Mark had also started the American Film Fund to raise funds to produce great films of that nature.

After a stellar evening with Mark and Stephanie, Eric and I slept surprisingly well in our luxurious bed by the ocean (Yes, I did have to throw that in.). The next morning, Mark made us an offer on our movie, the best part of which was the inclusion of full creative involvement. We told him we'd pray about it, of course.

During the Christmas holidays, Mark and Stephanie came to Atlanta, and we had another wonderful dinner to wrap up our agreement. Now the wheels are turning fast and Hollywood is reading (in *Variety*) about this and other screenplays Mark has optioned in his new venture.

Smiling with God

My head swims with the events of the past couple of months. And I have to smile when I think about how much fun God must have with the drama of our lives... How when we're twisted up in an anxious knot, He's calmly smiling, perfectly assured of His own ability to take the frayed threads of our despair and weave a glorious tapestry of fulfillment and life.

No, we don't know exactly what the future holds—or what challenges lie ahead in this adventure—but again it has been confirmed that we indeed serve a God of Amazing Grace.

To find out more about Mark Koch and his upcoming projects, please visit him at the following web sites: www.americanfilmfund.org, and www.preludeworldwide.com.