

ROMAN FEVER

A One-Act Play

Adapted by Renee C. Rebman

From the short story by Edith Wharton

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Roman Fever

-2-

DEDICATION

For my friend, Ray Gerrell.

The Playwright, Renee C. Rebman

STORY OF THE PLAY

A holiday in Rome provides an opportunity for two old friends, Mrs. Ansley and Mrs. Slade, to reminisce about the past. Now both widowed, the women begin to examine their strangely intertwined lives. A dramatic and emotional confrontation reveals a startling secret that is explored through well-staged flashback sequences. As events unfold, the women are forced to admit to their parts in an incident that changed their lives. A twist of fate long buried in the past leads to a surprising ending that will leave their friendship marked and the women changed forever.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 7 w - doubling possible)

MRS. GRACE ANSLEY: An easy-going woman who knits.

MRS. ALIDA SLADE: Her old friend. Troubled.

BARBARA ANSLEY: Vivacious daughter of Mrs. Ansley.

JENNY SLADE: Sweet daughter of Mrs. Slade.

WAITER: At Roman restaurant.

GRACE: As a young woman.

ALIDA: As a young woman.

DELPHIN SLADE: Alida's fiancé.

GRACE'S MOTHER: Over-protective.

PLACE: An open air Roman restaurant; the Coliseum;
young Grace's parlor.

TIME: Early 1900s and the 1920s.

PROPS

WAITER: Dishes, glasses, tray.

MRS. ANSLEY: Knitting, bag, small purse.

GRACE: Man's handkerchief.

GRACE'S MOTHER: Letter in envelope.

SETTING

The play can be performed in any space with as little as four chairs and a small round table serving as set pieces. If a full set is desired, a low stone wall placed UPS and flanked by Roman columns would serve to represent the restaurant and the Coliseum. A backdrop of Roman landscape may be hung behind. DSR are two chairs and the table set with dishes and the remains of lunch. (Two small parlor chairs can be placed DSL at the beginning of Scene 3.) The blackouts and scene changes should be done quickly, and once the setting is established, actors should feel free to use the full space available and not be limited. The set pieces serve only to designate passing of time. There should be an exit on both sides of the stage. Attention to costumes will make this a period play more than an extensive set.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: It is the 1920s. MRS. ANSLEY and MRS. SLADE are seated at the table. The WAITER enters from SL, clears some dishes, then exits again.)

MRS. ANSLEY: The sun is always so bright in Rome.

MRS. SLADE: Yes, it is. Another perfect day. Odd, isn't it?
Being here in Rome together.

MRS. ANSLEY: After all these years, you mean?

MRS. SLADE: Too many years. The time passed so quickly.
We were so young when we were here before. And now
we bring our daughters. They are the young ones.

MRS. ANSLEY: And we are old...old and widowed.

MRS. SLADE: *(Rising and pacing.)* And widowed...yes.

MRS. ANSLEY: What are you thinking, Alida Slade? I'm
familiar with your expressions, I've seen them for years.
You have something on your mind.

MRS. SLADE: You are familiar with my expressions, Grace.
That's exactly what I was thinking about.

MRS. ANSLEY: *(Picking up knitting from HER bag on the
floor.)* Don't talk in riddles, it bores me.

(The WAITER returns to remove remaining dishes.)

WAITER: May I get anything else for you ladies?

MRS. ANSLEY: No, thank you.

WAITER: *(Turning to MRS. SLADE.)* Ma'am?

MRS. SLADE: Nothing for me, either, thank you.

WAITER: Very good, then. Enjoy the sunshine.

(HE exits carrying the dishes.)

MRS. SLADE: That's what we are left with -- sunshine.
What we are expected to amuse ourselves with -- the
sunshine.

MRS. ANSLEY: *(Looking at the view.)* You can't think it
such a horrible fate. This is the most beautiful view in all
the world.

MRS. SLADE: It always will be to me...but even this beauty is lessened when seen through the eyes of a widow.

MRS. ANSLEY: Do you miss him that much, Alida? I am sorry.

MRS. SLADE: (*Angrily.*) I don't want your pity, Grace. I dislike being a widow. It isn't just his absence. Being the wife of a famous lawyer, I got used to his absence. But even then I had social demands. As his widow I have none. Everything has changed.

MRS. ANSLEY: Not quite everything.

MRS. SLADE: What do you mean to say?

MRS. ANSLEY: We're still together, you and I. Together as young girls. And now, two widows together.

MRS. SLADE: Living on the same street, taking holidays together...leading parallel lives.

MRS. ANSLEY: We grew up together, married at the same time, and bought our houses where people of our social set bought houses. We did what was expected of us.

MRS. SLADE: Maybe that wasn't good, always living so close. I couldn't buy new curtains for the parlor without you knowing the exact moment they went up.

MRS. ANSLEY: We both wanted to live where it was fashionable. We created the lives we thought we wanted to live.

MRS. SLADE: I'm not complaining about the neighborhood, just my neighbor. (*THEY laugh, the tension broken.*)

BARBARA: (*Loudly, from off SR.*) Well, come along! Let's leave the young things to their knitting!

JENNY: (*Also yelling from off SR.*) Oh, look here, Babs, -- not actually knitting!

(*MRS. ANSLEY puts down her knitting disgusted and embarrassed.*)

BARBARA: (*Still off stage.*) Well, I mean figuratively. After all, we haven't left our poor mothers much else to do.

MRS. ANSLEY: (*Rising and calling out in chastising tone.*) Barbara! Barbara, come here!

Roman Fever

-7-

JENNY: (*Still off stage.*) She heard you! They must still be in the restaurant.

BARBARA: (*Off stage.*) Hush... coming, Mother!

MRS. SLADE: (*To MRS. ANSLEY.*) That's what our daughters think of us!

MRS. ANSLEY: Not of us individually. We must remember that. It's just their idea of all mothers.

(*BARBARA and JENNY enter from SR.*)

BARBARA: Good afternoon, Mother. (*SHE kisses HER cheek.*)

JENNY: (*To her MOTHER while embracing her quickly.*) We were just leaving.

MRS. SLADE: And where are you off to this afternoon?

JENNY: Those two Italian aviators we introduced you to have invited us to Tarquinia for tea.

BARBARA: Doesn't that sound exciting? Flying to Tarquinia for tea.

MRS. SLADE: But Jenny, you barely know them.

JENNY: It's a perfectly proper invitation.

MRS. ANSLEY: They seemed nice enough when we met them, Alida.

BARBARA: Oh, they are nice. So very nice.

MRS. SLADE: Is that all you two think of, young men... romance?

BARBARA: What else is there to think of in Rome? (*JENNY giggles. MRS. SLADE reacts disdainfully. BARBARA tries to smooth things over.*) We have enjoyed the art and the architecture.

JENNY: Yes, the architecture is most interesting.

MRS. ANSLEY: As are your aviators, I'm sure.

MRS. SLADE: Don't encourage them.

MRS. ANSLEY: I remember what it was like to be young.

BARBARA: And what was it like, Mother?

MRS. ANSLEY: Don't tease me, Barbara.

BARBARA: I'm not teasing. I'm just surprised to hear you had a romance in Rome during your youth.

End of Freeview

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