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**R O M A N   F E V E R**

opera in one act

based on the story of the same name by

EDITH WHARTON

text by

ROGER BRUNYATE

music by

ROBERT WARD

CAST: ALIDA SLADE - Soprano  
JENNY SLADE, her daughter - Lyric Soprano  
GRACE ANSLEY - Mezzo-soprano  
BARBARA ANSLEY, her daughter - Mezzo-soprano  
WAITER - Baritone

SETTING: The terrace restaurant of a Roman Hotel perched on the edge of  
the Capitoline Hill overlooking the Forum and the Colosseum.

TIME: Mid 1920's

ORCHESTRA: One each: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn and Trumpet  
One Percussion Player: Tympani, Snare Drum, Glockenspiel,  
Tubular Bells and Drum Set  
One keyboard Synthesizer (Timbre indications are for KORG,  
01 W Pro Music Workstation  
String: 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2

Timing: approximately 1 hour

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## SYNOPSIS

Two recently widowed American ladies, Grace Ansley and Alida Slade, are taking tea on the terrace of a Roman hotel, overlooking the Forum. They are both in their forties, both well-to-do. Mrs. Slade (Alida) is the more dynamic of the pair, a born organizer. Mrs. Ansley (Grace) has the charm and quiet confidence of one who comes from an old family. It is early spring in the year 1924, around four-thirty in the afternoon.

The opera opens with a DUET in which the ladies reminisce about their first meeting in Rome as girls, some twenty years before. Alida was engaged to Delphin Slade; Grace had been attracted to Delphin also, but had married Horace Ansley only a few months after. The two couples had returned to New York, and largely lost touch in the intervening years. What a coincidence now to meet again, in Rome, at the same hotel, and each with a daughter in tow, as young as they were at their first meeting!

They compare their lives in the intervening years. Delphin Slade had been a high-flying lawyer who rose rapidly to prominence on the international scene. Grace and Horace Ansley, by contrast, had remained contentedly within the close social and professional circles of the "old New York." the ladies tease each other about their differences in temperament: Alida's restless energy as contrasted with Grace's propriety and prudence.

They also discuss their daughters, whose temperaments seem almost to reverse those of their mothers. Barbara Ansley (Babs), slightly the older at twenty-one, is a vivacious girl and a born leader. Jenny Slade, at nineteen, is a caring and dutiful daughter, apparently lacking in ambition or the spirit of adventure - much to her mother's frustration.

Now Babs and Jenny themselves arrive, bubbling with excitement. They have just come from taking coffee with two young officers of the Italian Flying Corps, to whom they had been introduced at an embassy ball a few nights earlier. Both ladies are pleased at the girls' excitement, although Mrs. Slade, who was indisposed on the night of the ball, has not met the officers. In a DUET the girls recount the conversation of the young men, and seem entranced with the romance and adventure of flying. There is even the possibility that the men will offer to take them up, if they can make the arrangements.

The conversation turns to the difference between the generations in the freedom accorded to young women. At the beginning of the century, chaperonage was much more strict - although Alida makes pointed hints (with a glance at Grace) that even then it could be evaded. And in their grandmothers' time, of course, with the danger of catching Roman Fever in the cold air after dark, there were health reasons for keeping one's daughters at home. Alida vaguely remembers an old story about two sisters who loved the same man, the waiter, it turns out, knows the story and tells it to them in an ARIA. The girls are horrified by the tale of the older sister sending the younger to the Colosseum at night to collect a flower for her album, as a result of which the younger sister caught the Roman Fever and died.

Alida asks again about the officers. When she hears that one of them is none other than the Marchese Campolieri, one of the best catches in Rome, she begins immediately to make plans. At that moment the restaurant telephone rings: the officers have arranged for planes that very night and propose a moonlight flight and dinner *al fresco* in the Alban Hills. Of course the girls must go. The mothers bustle them off to change.

Alida remarks that Babs is out to catch the Marchese and Jenny stands no chance against her. Her jealousy, which shows through her lighthearted manner, makes Grace uneasy and she excuses herself to pick up a stole for Babs which she had seen in a shop - it may get cold after dark. Alida replies, with a curious edge, that Grace should know if anybody, since she was so terribly ill herself that spring twenty years before. Grace goes out without pursuing the topic.

Now the sound of the evening bells is heard, ringing out from every church in Rome. Alida looks down on the Forum, and the sound awakens troubled memories. In an extended ARIA she recalls the excitement of that first spring when she was young and engaged to Delphin. But now the memories seem hollow, and the echoes of the bells remind her only of the passing years. Alida is never one to be kept down for long, however: she resolves to make a new life through her daughter, and to hear the bells ring out once more in triumph.

Jenny comes in, prettily but practically dressed. Babs is still in her room, putting the finishing touches on a more elaborate toilette. Alida urges her daughter to stand up for herself more, to make the most of her chance with the Marchese. Jenny, embarrassed by her mother's insistence (and perhaps a little envious of Babs herself) tells Alida that it isn't like that at all. She is too young to have any thoughts of marriage - she just wants to have fun exploring her new found adulthood. Dismissing her protestations, Alida presses a string of pearls upon Jenny to outshine the stole she knows Grace is buying for Babs. In exasperation Jenny blurts out that the trip has been arranged mainly so that the Marchese can be alone with Babs! At this moment Babs enters, resplendent in a stunning red dress which, when contrasted with Jenny's plainer, less attractive outfit, causes Alida to break the pearls in frustration. The pearls roll all over the terrace, and the girls and the waiter scramble to retrieve them.

Grace re-enters and comments on the comic tableau she sees. Dismissing the waiter, she compliments the girls on their appearance, while Alida remains unusually quiet - yet a sense of awkward embarrassment remains out of which a QUARTET develops. Each of the four characters feel themselves poised on the brink of something significant; but whereas Babs, Jenny and Grace soon break out of their introspection in eager anticipation of the future, Alida remains inevitably drawn back into the past.

The waiter brings in the cards of the two young men, who are in the lobby. Alida asks the girls to make her excuses, and Grace, who now realizes that something is very wrong, sends the girls off alone. The two ladies remain together on the terrace in the gathering dusk.

With apparent casualness, Alida once more recalls the events of the past. She reminds Grace of her awful illness twenty years before. It was always thought that she caught the fever, as in the old story, by visiting the Colosseum after dark. Grace is non-committal, but Alida presses. She did go out that night, didn't she? She went to meet Delphin Slade, Alida's own fiance. Alida can even quote the letter that took her there, purporting to come from Delphin. She can quote it because she wrote it - not meaning any harm, certainly not expecting her to get so terribly ill, just wanting her out of the way for a few weeks, and as a childish revenge. Grace is horrified at this revelation: it was the only letter that she ever had from Delphin, and he didn't even write it. Alida seizes on Grace's continued devotion to Delphin's memory as an excuse for her self-justifying anger, and accuses Grace of being a monster.

At this moment the waiter enters to switch on the lights for dinner. The ladies feel awkward and exposed. Each gathers up her things to leave, yet feeling that there is more to be said. Eventually Grace says she is sorry for Alida - sorry because Alida had to wait that night, and Grace did not. Alida cannot understand: how could Delphin have met her at the Colosseum when he didn't even know? But he did know, Grace tells her: he knew because she replied to his letter. Alida is thunderstruck - it had never occurred to her that Grace might reply. Nonetheless, she pulls herself together once more. After all, she is still the winner: she was married to Delphin and shared in his success for twenty years, whereas Grace had nothing but a brief memory and a letter that he didn't even write: Grace had nothing. On the verge of leaving, Grace turns quietly and says: "Nothing? I had Barbara!"

ROMAN FEVER received its world premiere on June 9, 1993, by Triangle Opera Theater in R.J. Reynolds Industries Theater at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

CAST OF FIRST PERFORMANCE  
(in order of appearance)

Alida Slade . . . . . Katherine Kulas  
Grace Ansley . . . . . Monica Reinagel  
Eduardo, the waiter . . . . . Paul Gibson  
Barbara Ansley . . . . . Karie Brown  
Jenny Slade . . . . . Melody Morrison

Conductor: Scott Tilley  
Stage Director: Charles St. Clair  
Scene Design: Richard Cannon  
Costume Design: Janet Melody  
Choreographer: Barbara Dickinson

# ROMAN FEVER

Opera in one act based on the story by

Edith Wharton

Libretto by  
Roger Brunyate

Music by  
Robert Ward

1 **Maestoso** (♩ = ca.66) Curtain rises; Alida Slade and Grace Ansley are at the table.

5 *They have finished their lunch. Alida rises and goes to the balustrade overlooking the Forum. Grace rises and follows to the balustrade.*

11 **Alida**  
*mp espr.*

A. It's still the most beau-ti-ful view in the world.

G. **Grace** *mf*  
It will al-ways be to me

16

A. *mp*  
When we first met— here— we were young-er than— our girls are now. Do you re-mem-ber?

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Based on ROMAN FEVER, short story by Edith Wharton

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20

(♩=80)

A. *mp* It was al - so spring-time then..

G. *mp* Yes, I re - mem - ber.

*mp* *p* *mp* *p*

25

*poco animando*  
*cresc.*

A. Ea - ger to en - coun - ter life. And Rome, new — and ex -

G. *mp* We were just nine - teen. Ea - ger to en - coun - ter life. *poco animando*

*mp* *p* *mp* *p* *cresc.*

29

A. *mf* *f* *mf* cit - ing, and sur - prise, and sur -

G. *mp* *mf* *f* a world full of se - crets, of se - crets and sur -

*mp* *mf* *f*

33 Rit. al Tempo primo

A. *mf* prise. Though— ma - ny years have passed *cresc.* mo - thers,

G. prise. *mf* and we have been in turn *cresc.* brides,

Rit. al Tempo primo

R.H. *cresc.*

37

A. *f* now wi - dows — now — wi - dows.

G. *f* wives, now wi - dows — *mp* Yet Rome, — the an - cient

*mf* *f* *p*

42

A. *mf* The ci - ty of our youth! And this the most beau - ti - ful view, the

*cresc.* *mf* *mp*

G. ci - ty, is still the ci - ty of our youth. the

*p*



A. *mf* *dim.* poco piu mosso  
 most beau-ti-ful in the world!

G. *mf* *dim.* *mp*  
 most beau-ti-ful in the world!

*mf* *dim.* *pp* *legato* *short* poco piu mosso For

G. *cresc.*  
 more than twen-ty years I was al-most a-fraid to re-turn to Rome, I sup-pose for fear it had changed.

*p* *mp* *mp*

A. *mp* *mf*  
 Yes, se-ve-ral times with Del-phin: con-fren-ces,.. meet-ings,.. af-ter the war.

G. But you've been back?

*p* *mf*

(indicating the necklace she is wearing)

A. It was here he bought me these pearls,.. for our fif-teenth an-ni-ver-sa-ry,.. you

*mf* *p* *cresc.*

64

(uncertain of what to say next)

Tempo primo  
(with slightly forced brightness)

*mp*

A. know. Well... what a co-in-ci-dence,  
Tempo primo

*p* *cresc.* *f* *p*

70

A. our meet-ing here, in the ver-y same— month, And each with a daugh-ter in

G. At the same— ho-tel.

*mf* *mf* *p*

74

A. tow, you with Babs, Like— his-to-ry re-peat-ing.

G. and Jen-ny with you. Like

*f* *mf* *mf* *mf*

78

(more serious)  
*mp*

G. his - to - ry re - peat - ing? Per - haps, Per - haps, — but

*pp* *legato*

82

A. Twen - ty two years. But I

G. we have changed, you know; it's been a long time.

*mf*

*pp*

85

A. knew you'd ne-ver stray far. Eigh-ty-third street, the same old house; we were neigh-bors there for a while.

*p*

88

G. Yes, we read a - bout you as you moved: in so - ci - e - ty pa - pers, "Who's Who,..." "Who's

*mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

*p* *mp*