

ROMAN FEVER

Story by Edith Wharton (1934)

Opera by Robert Ward and Roger Brunyate (1993)

Breakdown of the Story

sections are marked in red on the printout

1. Establishes the setting, the two women, their former friendship, and their daughters, heard in the distance, but not seen.
2. More on the daughters, who are flying to Tarquinia with two Italian aviators.
3. Fills in on their married lives, and how they see each other, "each through the wrong end of her little telescope."
4. They look down on the Forum in silence, as bells ring throughout the city. Mention of the strict chaperonage of their youth.
5. Mrs. Slade returns to the two daughters, Babs and Jenny, and foresees Babs' likely success with the eligible Marchese Campolieri, one of the aviators.
6. Mrs. Slade starts needling Grace Ansley, with mention of Roman Fever, which is explained as a story of her grandmother's.
7. Specific mention of the time when Grace went to the Coliseum at night, and became ill.
8. Alida Slade reveals her knowledge that Grace went to see Delphin Slade, her own fiancé, and that she knows because she forged the letter inviting her there. Grace is devastated by this revelation.
9. But Grace reveals that she did in fact meet Delphin that night, because she replied to him. Alida tries to turn the tables, but is foiled by Grace's subsequent revelation.

Breakdown of the Opera

indentation shows degree of originality

1. ALIDA, GRACE. Very much as in the beginning of the story. [1, 2]
2. ALIDA, GRACE, BARBARA, JENNY. The daughters enter and describe their meeting with the two aviators. They sit down to tea, and the conversation turns to the difference between chaperonage then and now. [*Inserted scene, elements of 4 and 5*]
3. ALIDA, GRACE, BARBARA, JENNY, WAITER. The Waiter is asked to tell the legend of Roman Fever, which now becomes a popular ballad rather than Grace's family tradition. [6]
4. ALIDA, GRACE, BARBARA, JENNY. Alida asks more about the Italian aviators, and learns that one is Marchese Campolieri. At that moment, the phone rings: it is the officers asking the girls out for a moonlight flight. [*Inserted scene, elements of 1 and 5*]
5. ALIDA, GRACE. Alida remarks that Babs seems out to catch the Marchese. Her jealousy makes Grace uncomfortable, and she excuses herself to buy a stole for Barbara. [*5 with added elements*]
6. ALIDA. Her aria. Looking out over "the vast *memento mori*," and spurred by the elegiac sound of the evening bells, Alida reflects back on the glory of her marriage, but also its disappointments, and resolves that she will live once more through her daughter. [*Mostly original, but giving voice to subtext in the story*]
7. ALIDA, JENNY. Jenny returns. She has dressed sensibly for the evening, but Alida chides her for looking so plain. She tries to give her the pearls. [*Inserted scene, original*]
8. ALIDA, GRACE, BARBARA, JENNY. Barbara enters, looking stunning, making Alida break the pearls in her unconscious fury. Grace enters with the stole just as the two girls and the Waiter are scrambling to pick them up. It is clear that Babs does not need the stole; she is perfect as she is. The four join in a Quartet, thinking of the night and its opportunities ahead; only Alida is unhappy. [*Inserted scene, original*]
9. ALIDA, GRACE. Frustrated in both her present and her past, Alida sets in to destroy Grace's calm serenity, but fails here too. [*Keeps close to the last half of the story, 7—9*]