

Roman Fever  
By Edith Wharton

Molly Person  
Dr. Cluff  
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In Roman Fever by Edith Wharton, is a story told in third person limited omniscient from the point-of-view of Alida Slade with brief passages from Grace Ansley's point-of-view. The main conflict in the story is Mrs. Slade vs. Mrs. Ansley. To some extent though, there is a conflict between Mrs. Slade and herself. As the title suggests, the story takes place in Rome. Ironically the title could be referring to the actual Roman fever contracted at night when the weather is very cold, and people would get sick; or the title could be alluding to Rome being a romantic and sentimental place where people would fall in love.

A revealing part in the story is when Mrs. Slade has just informed Mrs. Ansley that it was her who wrote the letter that took her to the coliseum the night she got sick in Rome. It starts in paragraph 84-96 with Mrs. Slade saying "And I wrote it. Yes; I wrote it! But I was the girl he was engaged to. Did you happen to remember that?" This is the point in the story when Mrs. Slade begins to turn vindictive toward Mrs. Ansley.

Mrs. Ansley answers back, not quite sure what to say but trying not to start a fight by returning Mrs. Slade's confrontation aggressively. Mrs. Ansley agrees with the statements that Mrs. Slade makes because she is thinking of the accusation brought before her and is trying to work it out in her mind.

In paragraph 88, Mrs. Slade succeeds in humiliating (or disgracing) Mrs. Ansley but finds no comfort in knowing that she has the upper hand. She realizes that she has given Mrs. Ansley such a terrible blow, and feels that she has to justify herself to Mrs. Ansley so that she will feel better about herself.

In Paragraph 89 Mrs. Slade explains to Mrs. Ansley why she did it. She confesses to having hated Mrs. Ansley all of these years because she knew that she was in love with him, that

she was afraid of her and what she might take away. Mrs. Slade says “—and I was afraid; afraid of you, of your quiet ways, your sweetness...your...well [...]” and goes on. Why she would be afraid to someone who is quiet and sweet? What would Mrs. Slade have said to finish this statement? These are both very puzzling questions. I think that Mrs. Slade has always been very jealous of Mrs. Ansley. She is jealous that she has a very lively, high-spirited daughter; she wishes that she could have been more like Mrs. Ansley. I believe the reason she did not finish this particular sentence is that it would have made her appear weak and in this situation, looking weak is the last thing she wanted to do. After her justifications to Mrs. Ansley, she still did not understand why she was doing it.

In paragraph 90, Mrs. Ansley suggests that Mrs. Slade is doing it because she has always hated her, and Mrs. Slade says, “Perhaps. Or because I wanted to get the whole thing off my mind.” It sounds as if she is still trying to convince herself; she is trying to find the reason why she is putting her friend through this pain. By Mrs. Slade saying, “Of course I never thought you’d die” she is trying to make good with Mrs. Ansley that she never wished to do her permanent harm.

Mrs. Ansley stops speaking in paragraph 91 and sits there with Mrs. Slade looming over her. Mrs. Slade “was conscious of a strange sense of isolation, of being cut off from the warm current of human communion.” Mrs. Slade knows that she hurt Mrs. Ansley and that her condescension will not be rectified easily. So that she will not feel so cut off Mrs. Slade goes on to trying to pry into Mrs. Ansley’s thoughts by saying, “You think me a monster!”

Mrs. Ansley who has suffered a great deal by this new revelation that she doesn’t know what to think of Mrs. Slade and trying to weight the whole conversation, and her entire life, confirms with Mrs. Slade that she had written the letter.

Paragraph 94, Mrs. Slade continues to keep Mrs. Ansley in her place by saying, “Ah, how your care for him still!” This is meant to throw in Mrs. Ansley’s face that she is still in love with Mrs. Slade’s husband after all these years thereby making Mrs. Ansley feel guilty. Mrs. Ansley keeps her composure by stating that she simply cared for that memory.

Paragraph 96 reveals a lot about how Mrs. Slade feels about Mrs. Ansley—she is overwhelmed by jealousy. The first sentence, in particular, is very striking, “Mrs. Slade continued to look down on her. Literally, Mrs. Slade was looking down as Mrs. Ansley who was kneeling at her feet. Figuratively, she was looking down on Mrs. Ansley because she felt superior to her because she had the upper hand in the battle. Mrs. Slade could not face the fact that Mrs. Ansley cared so much for that letter that Mr. Slade did not write, and still thinks about it even though it is now ashes. The final sentence of this passage, in paragraph 96, reads, “Wasn’t it she who was the monster?” This statement sums up the feelings Mrs. Slade has had toward Mrs. Ansley for 20+ years. She felt herself the monster for making her friend feel this way, but as a justification of her own actions, throws that label to Mrs. Ansley so that she can continue to hate her for lusting after her fiancée at the time.

Throughout this passage, Mrs. Slade continually tries to justify her actions more to herself than to Mrs. Ansley because she knows that she is hurting her friend but does not want to, nor does she know why. I think that Mrs. Slade has an inferiority complex, and people with inferiority complexes need to crush other people’s idea of themselves so that they feel better. This is exactly what she is doing. Mrs. Slade feels inferior to Mrs. Ansley, and in order to make herself feel superior has to overpower Mrs. Ansley. What the reader later finds out is that although Mrs. Slade had written the note, Mrs. Ansley had answered and because of that, Delphin went to the coliseum and they were together that night. At the end of the story, Mrs.

Ansley throws the last and most important blow to Mrs. Slade, that Barbara was a product of that night in Rome. Maybe Mrs. Slade should have kept her vindictiveness to herself and not said anything, and she could have kept on believing that Delphin was completely faithful to her.