

MONOLOGUES FOR WOMEN

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ROMAN FEVER

by Greg Jones Ellis

An Adaptation of the story by Edith Wharton

FEMALE, 50s-60s

PERIOD DRAMA

Mrs. Slade is a wealthy widow. She and her husband Delphin were pillars of New York society in the early part of the 20th Century. She is sitting in a café overlooking the Roman forum, on holiday with old acquaintance Mrs. Ansley. She prides herself on her appearance, but has always envied Mrs. Ansley's more effortless attractiveness. She recalls the death of her child.

MRS. SLADE

The loss of a child is impossible to get over. It was somehow easier when Delphin was alive. Not that it didn't hurt every day to remember, but somehow, looking at Delphin made the pain less...unendurable. And, of course, I was distracted. I had to be the hostess to an unending parade of clients. I had to keep myself and the house up, to match Delphin's brilliance. And I always felt I did my bit rather well. Of course, there was always the whispering. One charming guest, after too much port, was heard – by me – to say “What, that handsome woman with the good clothes and the eyes is Slade's wife! Really! Generally the wives of celebrities are such frumps. Heaven knows I took that to heart and doubled my beauty regimen. Now, I can let myself go like---

(Looks at Mrs. Ansley, then stops herself)

Now that I am alone.

DEAD AIR
A drama by Greg Jones Ellis

FEMALE, 40s-50s
CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

MOTHER is a popular daytime talk show host who rose to prominence after years as a warm-voiced local radio personality. Her son is a reclusive genius who has expressed contempt for her rise to fame and her loss of integrity. She has had a disturbing day on her show when she found herself speechless after being challenged by an on-air guest. Her son has just asked her why she loves her on-air job, which he has called “bizarre.”

MOTHER

(To herself). I loved being a wife and a mother. People think it’s either/or. You either hate where you are and love where you want to go. I didn’t hate my life before my show. I loved being good at things. Which I was.

When your father looked as if he was going to lose his first job, I looked up the best careers for him. Forced him to sit down and fill out the aptitude tests. Typed up cover letters. Signed him up for the courses he needed. It was always his choice – what to do, I mean. But when he did lose that job, he wasn’t floundering around, complaining that all the college boys were getting the jobs. He picked a good one – and he’s done well. But I was--, well I got him on the right path.

When you came along, yes, I read Dr. Spock. Yes, I listened to every teacher and social worker and doctor about nursing, potty training, kindergarten, phonics. I didn’t trust myself to know that stuff. I trusted my...my ability to find things out.

And when you showed your amazing ability, it scared me. I was afraid I wouldn’t know enough to help you. To get you into special classes if you wanted to. To make sure your gift wasn’t squandered because I didn’t know enough to help you make the most of it.

And you and your father. *(Laughs).* You two laughed. Or fought me – fight me. Or act like having a gift is nothing.

I have a gift, and I’m using it. So if it’s “bizarre” to you...I don’t really give a damn. I don’t give a damn if you laugh at me, or ignore me or minimize what I do. Okay? Because you’re only two people in the world. And a hell of a lot of other people *listen to me when I talk to them!*

And you know what I love? I love the part where people smile at me and clap for me and TREAT ME LIKE I HAVE VALUE! And today...it didn’t happen.

ALL SAVE ONE
A comedy-drama by Greg Jones Ellis

FEMALE, 50s
PERIOD COMEDY-DRAMA

Claire Morgan, a beloved British character actress, has been in a “lavender marriage” with a famous writer for 25 years. A closeted gay man, her husband has announced the he can “change.” Meanwhile, Claire has fallen in love with a straight man who has proposed to her. Her husband opposes the marriage. The time and place: Hollywood 1950.

CLAIRE MORGAN

I don't quite know what is happening around here! I have been married to someone who has never desired me. Other than a few furtive, pathetic wriggings in the early days, I have been denied the very basic pleasure of falling into bed with a man night after night and being reasonably assured that he truly wants to kiss me, caress my breasts and insert himself inside me. As a result, over time I came to believe that I was somehow lacking. This was not your fault, Sims. But it came to be.

What *is* your fault is how ruthlessly you continue to exploit my insecurity. How you can be so blind as to think that I don't have the same longings you have.

But it has been ever so. It was you who recommended that I become a “character woman” in my thirties. It was you who suggested that my natural inclination toward weight was an asset rather than a liability. It was you who continued to want me as a witty, sexless hostess for your vapid parties. And you succeeded in almost convincing me that the only positive attributes one can say about Claire Morgan is that she had a good way with a witty line.

CULVER CITY FEVER
A contemporary comedy-drama by Greg Jones Ellis

FEMALE, 50s
CONTEMPORARY COMEDY

Gerry was the star of a prime time drama that became a hit, but more because of its over-the-top campiness than its quality. She is asking her old friend Jane to help coach her for a role that could reclaim her dignity and her reputation.

GERRY

Do you know what it's like to be a joke? I'm a joke. I'm Marvalicious Bitchall. God, I think you are truly the only person alive who knows what I was like back then. You know I was serious. You know that I worked harder than anyone. I badgered people into doing scenes with me. I haunted the hallways looking for the best actors. I *made* them work with me on scenes. I showed up on their doorstep at midnight after waiting tables all day. When somebody didn't show up at *my* doorstep I hunted them down. When we had to bring props to work with, I was on the frigging D train from Brooklyn with a potted palm, a suitcase full of dirty clothes, whatever. I stripped naked in front of horny acting students and pervy acting teachers. (*Pause.*) I didn't want to be a household name. I wanted to be a working actress. I wanted to be in a company somewhere and do Linda Loman in March and Lady Capulet in May and carry a spear in between. Well, that didn't happen. As you know. When you and I were young and cute we did nothing but dumb bits. To console ourselves we'd say that we were really *character actresses*. Wait till we're 40. We turned 40. And went from playing stewardesses to playing salesladies in the same stupid one-off shit. The most money I made in a year was when I got that Midol commercial. God, that was a shock to the system. I thought they wanted me for the chick with the menstrual cramps. No, I was her helpful Mom with the bottle of pills. But the damn thing ran forever. From then on, I'd walk into auditions and some kid at the desk would say, "It's Midol Mom!"

CULVER CITY FEVER
A comedy-drama by Greg Jones Ellis

FEMALE, 50s
CONTEMPORARY COMEDY-DRAMA

Jane is confiding in her old friend Gerry as she tries to sort out why she left her career as a promising actress to raise her daughter. The daughter, now grown, has put distance between them.

JANE

I have no idea what I did as a mother. I look back on it and I try to do the "I did my best" thing. But I didn't. Sometimes. I mean, look, I never pulled a Sylvia Plath and stuck my head in the oven while my kid played in the next room, but sometimes...sometimes I didn't...do my best. I didn't. And there were times, God help me, when Sarah hit the teenage years where I just...couldn't stand listening to her. I mean, the whining. Or... I thought it was whining. I realize now that I was just so impatient. She was just a kid. She was immature. She had no focus. And I think of myself as having nothing BUT focus. From birth.

And here's the thing: it's great for an actress...actor. Not so great once you stop being one and try to be responsible for someone else. And, that focus? My focus? It may have blurred out, but it came out in all the wrong ways. With Sarah. See, it wasn't her. It was me. I wasn't disapproving of her lack of focus. I was mourning my own. Every time I criticized her or rolled my eyes or lost my temper, it wasn't me teaching her to be more mature. It was me being angry at *me*. "Why am I wasting my time on you, you little---" (Pause). It's the truth. It is.

CULVER CITY FEVER
A comedy-drama by Greg Jones Ellis

FEMALE, 50s
CONTEMPORARY COMEDY-DRAMA

GERRY

Gerry's friend Jane has just confided that she (Jane) failed as a mother to her grown daughter Sarah. Gerry, a tough-talking survivor, is reassuring Jane—in her own way—that revealing your true emotions to a child isn't a bad thing.

Impatience, anger, resentment – do you think these are cardinal sins? Do you think Sarah doesn't know that maybe you weren't always thrilled with your life? Doesn't every kid sense it from time to time? It's a good thing! Your parents owe you a lot: safety, food, love, opportunity. But they also owe you something else: reality. Jesus! All this "quality time" shit. All this "Mommy's not mad at you, she just has a headache!" "Daddy's trying out his outside voice!" "You dropped the goddamn baseball, but here's a ribbon and a pizza party and we'll distract you by reminding you how GREAT you are at coloring inside the lines!" Maybe once in a while it's okay to say, "Goddamn it, kid, could you shut the fuck up? I had a rotten day and your shit is the turd that tipped the pile!"

DIVINITY PLACE
A comedy Greg Jones Ellis

Period Comedy
Female | 20s-40s

***About the Play:** Despite religious differences, Jean and Buddy have decided to marry. World War II is on, and Buddy will probably be drafted soon. But they have a problem: the priest announces that no wedding can take place until Buddy signs a form promising he'll raise their children Catholic. But Buddy won't sign. His word has to be good enough. And Jean's behind him. The stalemate gets even crazier with the arrival of Buddy's tyrannical father, a highly pregnant bridesmaid and various other friends and family who try to convince the older generation that love really should conquer all.*

***Time:** Summer 1942*

***About the Scene:** Buddy and Jean's friend Angela has just gone into labor. It seems too early, and Jean's wise older cousin CEIL wants to get Angela to the hospital. She is furious that Buddy's father and the old priest are still arguing about whether Buddy and Jean should be allowed to be married. After holding her tongue for two hours, the usually quiet CEIL gives the two men a much-needed talking-to.*

CEIL

I just called down the back alley to Mr. Zimmer the iceman. He'll take Angela to the hospital, if she can make it. (*Looking around.*) Is anyone looking after Angela? (*No response.*) There's a girl up there having her first baby. She should have it in a hospital, not in my bedroom! Father, you should be up there, not down here arguing. And you (*meaning Mr. Sinclair*) should have been looking for a cab. For God's sake, stop flapping your gums and move! Give them your blessing. (*To Holy Joe.*) You, too. But *stop* all this talking!

You want things your way! Well, don't we all! But if you've *really* been praying all these years, you know you don't always get what you want! This girl has seen both her parents die. She's had to make her own way, with the little bit of help her family could give her. She's had to put up with a spiteful selfish old guardian—And Buddy may very well have to go to war. What are *you* doing? Both of youse ought to be ashamed. Two wonderful young people just want to be *happy*. And they're both so confused, they want to give up the little bit of themselves that makes them who they are – to please two old men who don't even know what they want!

DIVINITY PLACE
A comedy Greg Jones Ellis

Period Comedy
Female | 40s-60

About the Play: *Despite religious differences, Jean and Buddy have decided to marry. World War II is on, and Buddy will probably be drafted soon. But they have a problem: the priest announces that no wedding can take place until Buddy signs a form promising he'll raise their children Catholic. But Buddy won't sign. His word has to be good enough. And Jean's behind him. The stalemate gets even crazier with the arrival of Buddy's tyrannical father, a highly pregnant bridesmaid and various other friends and family who try to convince the older generation that love really should conquer all.*

Time: *Summer 1942*

About the Scene: *Buddy and Jean have just told Buddy's Mother (Mrs. Sinclair) that they're going to get married over the disapproval of both Buddy's father and the Monsignor at Jean's parish. MRS. SINCLAIR, away from her domineering husband, tells the couple they have her blessing.*

MRS. SINCLAIR

Then, I want you to marry Jean. *(The floodgates open. She comes into the living room.)* Oh, Jean, honey, I'm so sorry. I've always liked you. You're funny and you're sweet. And you'll keep him in line. Not that he needs that much keeping in line. But you'll stand up to him. Not like...me. You'll listen, too. *Really* listen. Like, like an A student listens to a teacher. *Hard*. With *questions*. And I think you'll teach him a thing or two, too. Oh, sweetie, I wish I could tell your Mama and Dad how much I liked them. And how wonderfully you turned out. Forgive a foolish old housewife her husband. He *isn't* God. But he runs everything. I'm...just sorry. And...well, I'm afraid that even if you marry his son, he's not going to like you for a very long time. *(She puts a motherly arm around Jean.)* But I do. And every chance I get, I'll sneak you into the kitchen and tell you so. *(She hugs Jean impulsively, as if they're saying goodbye.)* Remember that. *(Turning to Buddy)* And you. I...oh, I love you, my sweet little boy. *(She buries her head on his shoulder.)*
