



The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone

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The story of a wealthy, fiftyish American widow, recently a famous stage beauty, but now "drifting." The novel opens soon after her husband's death and her retirement from the theatre, as Mrs. Stone tries to adjust to her aimless new life in Rome. She is adjusting, too, to aging ("The knowledge that her beauty was lost had come upon her recently and it was still occasionally forgotten.") With poignant wit and his own particular brand of relish, Williams charts her drift into an affair with a cruel young gigolo: "As compelling, as fascinating, and as technically skilled as his plays." (*Publishers Weekly*)

The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone Details

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David says

Oh dear. What to say about this one? Such incisive writing, and beautiful in so many ways, but then the awful ending that I should have seen coming right from the first, that anyone would have seen we were headed for, but not me, I always want things to end well. Worst of all, when I was done, it was hard not to think that Mrs. Stone was more like a gay man of that era than a woman, but that only made me feel sexist for having such a thought. In any case, I was so hoping for something more interesting to come of the story, it was such a let-down to have it end the way it did. But that's my fault for wanting the character to come out alright, when life is not always like that, is it? As Tennessee Williams knew only too well.

R.a. says

Here is a delightful little novel(la) from Tennessee Williams—the only one he apparently penned.

“Beguiling” describes this piece. Like some of his plays, a deeper investigation of life lurks below the seeming “light” title.

Protagonist: Mrs. Stone. Stage Actress, (Retired). Socialite.

Plot: Mrs. Stone begins her “new life” of retired leisure in Rome.

Well . . . no surprise so far given Williams’ characters in other work.

Nor is there surprise in the “uncovering” of Mrs. Stone’s character as the narrative moves forward. Nor in the difficult, cruel relationship with Paolo. And finally . . . nor in the novel’s climax. All these elements of story Mr. Williams has wrought in some shape before.

The surprise here is the subject of Mrs. Stone’s flight. That horrible abyss which Nietzsche described as such a terror that humans create whatever diversions or illusions they can in order to avoid it.

Perhaps Rome, Paolo, the Contessa, etc., were the worst possible acquaintances to make upon retirement. Yes. Mrs. Stone . . . Karen . . . becomes Mrs. Stone after all—when this Roman Spring ends.

This little fiction not only entertains but also provides a cautionary tale.

Lucy Qhuay says

Mrs Karen Stone, a faded American actress is adrift in life.

She gave up her career after a disastrous experience playing Juliet, her ridiculous husband, with whom she had a mother-son relationship died two years ago and to top it all, she's nothing but a shadow of her former self.

Well in her fifties, she can't accept the reality she's old now, the beauty which was once a shield and a means to gain power, fame and privilege, gone.

She is currently living in Rome, wandering around spending her late husband's fortune and socializing with shallow, insipid creatures worse than herself, while trying to come to terms with her reality.

So it is that she meets and falls prey to Paolo, a cruel, vain 30 years younger gigolo, who cares about nothing but how others, be it male or female, will provide for him.

This is an enjoyable enough read, since the writing is quite good, but I can't say I truly liked it, since I didn't really care about the characters or the plot in general.

I'm sure this author must have better works.

Sara says

Although Tennessee Williams is most well-known as a playwright, this novella was the first thing I read by Williams. An aging actress has an "All About Eve-esque" crisis when she retires from the stage. She travels to Roma and deals with her loss of youth, beauty, and career. Mrs. Stone has an affair with a young Italian hottie who uses Mrs. Stone as his sugar mama. I also loved the movie version of this book starring Helen Mirren and Anne Bancroft.

Laura says

A failing star is faced with a life-style change when her rich husband suddenly dies while they are en route to Italy. She then sets off in a series of flings with gigolos found for her by an aging contessa. Each contact spirals further out of control until she becomes obsessed with one young man, who initially treats her well, but then with disdain.

A movie was made based on this book and it is available at YouTube

Fabian says

And so I thought to myself recently: Yes, a play. A play next; a play will do. I blame it on the magnificence of *Raisin in the Sun*, reading it recently--I know I must now immerse myself in these robust beautiful dramas that have that elusive double magic: the magic of the stage as it comes to life; the magic of the text that depicts almost everything in black and white symbols aka dialogue.

I pride myself in having read most major works by Tennessee Williams. *Cat, Desire, Menagerie*. (My pleasure derived from each, in this precise order.) So that was my guy: except for one thing: the benefit of

ignorance. My own, in this case. As it turns out "Spring" is a novel--despite its size and physical shape, which screams out that it's a play. No problem. Imagine then as shock morphed into delight. (My own.)

It turns out Williams is one exemplary novelist. This, his first novella, is utter testament. And, may I say it, he's better at it than I would have thought. Better than his dramatic plays? Possibly so!

This may be another incarnation of "Death in Venice" by Thomas Mann. Meaning: Mandatory!

PS The ending still sends shivers down my sound, dudes!

Susan says

Years ago a professor remarked in class that there are no heroines in literature above the age of 30. So far I've only been able to come up with Mrs. Dalloway, and now Mrs. Stone. An interesting character study of an aging actress attempting to cope with her loss of beauty and importance, this novella must be one of the first pieces of literature to mention menopause.

Katherine says

Tennessee Williams is a god! A motto for those with imposter syndrome: "What's talent but the ability to get away with something?" The novel follows the purposeless (but not directionless) "drift" of a ruthless, career-driven actress now retired and in her 50s (retired because the tradition of playing Juliet until an actress is about to drop dead no longer works these days, sadly), who has to pay young men to date her. I ask, why doesn't she just go with men her own age? But Mrs. Stone loves beauty too much -- beauty being "a world of its own whose anarchy had a sort of godly license" -- and, to Mrs. Stone's mind (or her world's), you can't have age with beauty. Beauty and sordid encounters (the one with the other) are all that can stop her drift into meaningless nothingness. You think maybe she should see a good psychiatrist, because she might easily come to a bad end. Read this and see!

Lois says

There's nothing new about the cougar concept. Tennessee Williams describes the sad case of a woman who has acquired a young Italian lover 30 years her junior. The Roman world he describes is bizarre and fascinating. A decrepit and impoverished contessa acquires a stable of gigolos, splitting their financial takes with her. The gigolos move easily and shamelessly between male and female patrons.

Now that I have read a few Tennessee Williams works, I can see that he has many female characters who have "lost" their young good looks, but not their rapacious appetites. Blanche was 30, and Mrs. Stone is 50+, but both are perceived to be washed up in terms of sex appeal.

This is an intriguing quick read, but not one of TW's finest works.

Sabrina says

Those who like nice, neatly tied little pretty packages of stories will not appreciate this book because well it's not a simplistic book. In fact, this book is pretty intense! Not a fairy tale, that's for sure. More of a cautionary tale for its times. Of course nowadays no one looks askance at May/December relationship where the woman is older, but the fact that a woman would actually pay for sex? Well, that's still a shocker even by today's standards. I found this book interesting in the way that it was not written in a prurient fashion, but one that rather 'bares' the souls of people instead. The film adaptations were interesting, too. I watched the movies before reading the book, but I would recommend reading the book before watching either the 1961 or 2003 version. The latter, is closer to the book, that much I will tell you without giving out spoilers.

Joselynn says

I love stories of women falling from eminence and beauty. Is that depressing?

Lukáš Palán says

Tonda Williams, d?da Robbieho Williamse, který napsal t?eba Ko?ka do stanice Tramvaj, se v ?ímském jaru paní Kamenové v?nuje stárnutí a je to hezký, vtipný i smutný zárove?. Tak už to bývá, když stará slavná here?ka dopádluje do ?íma a za?ne randit s mladým italským h?ebcem, kterému jde ovšem jen o peníze. To já schvaluji - k?ž se jednoho dne dožijeme toho, kdy budou mít všechny peníze na sv?t? jen ženy a my jím za peníze budeme d?lat sex! Co mi to jen p?ipomíná!

Jednohubka, která rychle utekla a sem tam se zablejskla opravdu nádherným jazykem. Všechno je navíc krásn? aristokraticky p?epálený a bonusem je bestiáln? drtivý a smutný konec, umn? schovaný v posledním odstavci.

Povšimn?te si, že anglický název knihy (The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone) je pravd?podobn? jediný název knihy v historii lidstva, který ukrývá Romana Zkamene!!

Denis says

After reading this gem of a book, I was wishing Williams had written more novels. Brief but complex, filled with themes and characters that are very representative of the Williams world as we know it from the theater, this sharp, cruel, witty, moving novel shines through its exquisite style and profound, bittersweet intelligence. For some reasons, it made me think of Truman Capote, too. It's ambiguous on many levels, yet remarkably frank on some other ones, especially sexuality. Vivien Leigh gave a bravura performance as Mrs Stone in the early sixties, and I couldn't help but think about her when reading the novel, but Williams' own Mrs Stone may be less tragic, and more full of life and vibrancy, than Leigh's version. Interestingly, I saw the ending of the movie – which is very faithful to the ending of the book – as the symbolic approach of death. But In Williams' book, it can also be interpreted as the approach of a renewed freedom. In any case, here's a remarkable novel that deserves to better known.

A.M. says

Youth and beauty are everything in the arts and when the famous stage actress, Mrs Stone, turns fifty and foolhardily tries to act as Juliet, the backlash is sufficient for her to leave the stage. She and her wealthy husband go on a holiday. Her husband has a heart attack on the plane and she is left alone. She stays in Rome and amasses a new audience of sycophants. It is about the 1950's but it is a conservative world with a vague mention of homosexuality in a couple of places.

She is a tragic figure - rich in money and contacts - but poor in real friends and any belief in herself. Her value is in the past when she was young and beautiful. Her marriage was oddly sexless, more of a mothering relationship, as she was frightened of having a child of her own. And it makes her perhaps, more attracted to the beautiful young man, Paolo. After months of denying him, she finally takes him to her bed.

Paolo asks her,

Why did you want to know when my friend needed the money?

Because you are very young, said Mrs Stone, and very foolish and very beautiful. And because I am not so very young any more and not so beautiful, but beginning to be *very* wise...

She is drifting and she knows it but she is not a fool. She knows what Paolo is but she is willing to ignore that, at least until she is insulted by the Contessa (who takes a cut of his earnings), when she hears her gossiping about Mrs Stone and is unaware that she can hear. Then Paolo flirts with a new, younger film actress and when she berates him, in a final insult, he mocks her for her fading beauty and slaps her. She throws them all out.

For weeks, she has been followed by another young man. He is a homeless street boy; a few steps lower than Paolo. He has an aura of intensity and menace. He exposes himself to her. He frightens her. He stalks her. He stands outside of her palazzo for hours and looks up at her balcony. Paolo noticed him and pointed him out to her.

He is described as "*His beauty was notable even in a province where the lack of it is more exceptional in a young man.*" He refuses an approach from a male tourist even though he is starving and poorly clothed; he wants her.

But at her lowest ebb, it is to him that she throws the keys to her palazzo.

And that is where the story ends.

Is it a happy ending? I fear not. The aura of menace remains for me. There is a mention of murders earlier; Paolo jokes about it to her. Will the young man kill her? Or, will he be her new lover with no financial requirement like Paolo who would have left her for more money or a younger woman. Will he love her; as she desperately wants? Will he adore her happily for years to come? Restore the fallen goddess to her pedestal?

But if she keeps him, her social standing in Rome is gone. The Contessa gives Paolo an acceptable cover. That is tolerated; taking a street boy to your bed is not. She cannot appear in public with him, but perhaps she does not want to. Will he be her private lover? The reader doesn't know.

The language is beautiful, and written without speech marks in an omniscient narrator style. The paragraphs are sometimes pages long, but it is a great example of the novella divided into three parts; the first, her current life, the second her past, and the third the culmination and her future. If, of course, she has one.

Angela Joyce says

Yikes. How elegantly corrupt.

Simona says

"Prim?vara la Roma a doamnei Stone" - sau unde pot duce nes?buin?a ?i autoam?girea, atunci când nu accep?i c? ai îmb?trânit ?i insi?ti s? ignori distan?a dintre genera?ii, c?utând cu disperare un partener mult mai tân?r.

De la sublim la ridicol nu este, a?a cum se va vedea, decât un foarte mic pas.

De notat ?i ecranizarea din 1961, cu Vivien Leigh ?i Warren Beatty.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Vderevlean says

O poveste de dragoste între o v?duv? bogat?, american?, fost? actri?? destul de celebr? ?i un tân?r gigolo, italian, a c?rui via?? se bazeaz? pe cucerirea doamnelor în vârst? ?i „s?r?cirea” lor atât cât îi permite rela?ia. În subtext, o poveste despre ratare, despre ie?irea de pe scen? ?i frica de e?ec ?i moarte. Bine scris, romanul nu reu?e?te totu?i s? ias? din tiparele melodramatice ale rela?iei dintre personajele principale.

Pare perfect pentru scenariul unui film pe care nu cred c? l-a? vedea.

Claudiu D. says

O actrita ajunsa la 50 de ani nu isi poate accepta varsta si apeleaza la diverse artificii (cel mai important fiind un tanar de 20 si ceva de ani, specializat in arta seducerii femeilor passe) pentru a-si mentine o aparenta tinerete.

Am citit romanul acesta ca pe o novelizare a unei piese de teatru. As minti sa nu spun ca mi-a placut mult (de aici si cele patru stele), dar aveam mereu in minte ideea ca, de fapt, ar trebui sa fie o piesa, nu un roman.

Williams scrie superb si cred ca abia acum pot sa ii apreciez in adevaratul sens al cuvantului geniul stilistic. In piese, el creeaza un limbaj propriu al persoanelor, iar in acest roman vocea narativa este si ea perfect individualizata stilistic.

Mi-a placut mult.

Recomand!

Alex Ricard says

This book is all about two simple, powerful fundamentals of every person's life: The relationship between our present and our past, and the relationship between our memories and the truth.

Mrs. Stone is in denial, sort of. She is depressed, and she is listless, and she doesn't know how she got here. She used to be, or so she says, someone important. Someone worth watching. But now she retreats into the shadows, in another world. Here, she can escape her past and be her own new person.

But Rome is old, and history is in its bones. It doesn't easily brush aside the past as much as America does. And it's always watching...
