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The Enchanted April

Drama/Comedy by Bonnie Roberts
Adapted from the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim

The Enchanted April

Drama/Comedy. By Bonnie Roberts. Adapted from the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim. Cast: 4m., 5w. WWI has ended, and in the England of 1922, everyday life is slowly settling back to normal. It has been raining for days in London when Lotty discovers an advertisement describing San Salvatore, a villa on the Italian seashore, and she impulsively convinces Rose, an acquaintance from her club, to rent it with her. Their own advertisement for traveling companions to help share expenses has only two respondents: caustic Mrs. Fisher sits alone in her parlor, surrounded by the photos of famous writers she knew in her youth; the beautiful Lady Caroline hides the pain of a lost love with an air of sophistication and a whirlwind of high-society parties. Can these four very different women come together at the villa, find healing in the tranquil beauty of their surroundings, and rediscover hope and love? Will their husbands and friends who join them there also fall under the spell of San Salvatore? *Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes. Code: E60.*

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THE ENCHANTED APRIL

By

BONNIE ROBERTS

Adapted from the novel by

ELIZABETH VON ARNIM



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ELIZABETH VON ARNIM

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(THE ENCHANTED APRIL)

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For all the women who transformed my life:
Gail, Lesley, Rae, Pat, Melanie, Kristal, Annie,
my sister, Julia
and my mother, Ellen.
You are all my San Salvatore.

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The Enchanted April was first produced at Jackson County Comprehensive High School, Jefferson, Ga. The premiere performance was in April 2010 in the McMullan Auditorium at JCHS. The cast was as follows:

Lotty Wilkins	Lindsey Slayton
Rose Arbuthnot	Ansley Moore
Mrs. Fisher	Amanda Seden
Lady Caroline Dester	Tori Dixon, Shelby Myers
Mellersh Wilkins	Steven Strickland
Frederick Arbuthnot	Robert Stephens
Mr. Briggs	Cody Ramey, Robert Sparrow
Beppo	Johnny Boddie
Francesca	Colleen Gearty

THE ENCHANTED APRIL

CHARACTERS:

LOTTY WILKINS early 30s
ROSE ARBUTHNOT early 30s
MRS. FISHER late 50s, early 60s
LADY CAROLINE DESTER. early to mid-20s
MELLERSH WILKINS early 40s
FREDERICK ARBUTHNOT early 40s
MR. BRIGGS mid- to late 30s
FRANCESCA. mid- to late 50s
BEPP0. early 30s

ADDITIONAL SERVANTS as needed.

NOTE: See back of script for expanded character descriptions.

EXPANDED CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS:

LOTTY WILKINS – Lotty has an overwhelming bubbly and impulsive personality. She blurts out exactly what she is thinking, although others may not completely understand what it is she is trying to say and she almost always immediately regrets saying it. She is free spirited and almost childlike but extremely shy, loving and kind.

ROSE ARBUTHNOT – Rose is struggling with her relationship with her husband after the loss of their child early in the marriage. Her porcelain Madonna-like features give her an air of fragility but she is determined to live a life of purpose, helping the poor, working at her church. Her peaceful and calm demeanor hides a deep sadness.

MRS. FISHER – Mrs. Fisher is a widow living alone. Although she has money, she prefers to live in the house her father left her, full of the memories of famous people she knew as a child. Her home is full of pictures of authors and poets. She despises the frivolity of the post-war modern generation and has no time for silliness or people with a lack of decorum.

LADY CAROLINE DESTER – Caroline is the beautiful and pampered daughter of the Droitwich family and spends her time flitting from party to party. She has all the training and manners of a well-bred society lady but these mask the terrible sadness and pain inside. The man she loved and would have married was killed in the war. Her beauty gives the impression of being calm and cool

even when she is fuming on the inside, and this frustrates her.

MELLERSH WILKINS – Mellersh is an intelligent, precisely mannered accountant, the complete opposite of his wife, Lotty. He thinks out everything he wishes to say and plans every move. He cares deeply about things but feels he must plan his life precisely to be happy. He is frustrated by his wife's impulsive, child-like behavior, wishing she would grow up, settle down and live out his well-planned life. He loves his wife but he doesn't understand her.

FREDERICK ARBUTHNOT – Frederick worked as a civil servant until he began his successful career as an author of racy romantic novels. He is deeply in love with his wife, but since the death of their child, he has retreated from her overwhelming sadness. He is hurt that she criticizes his novels as “sinful.” He misses his youth and wants to be seen as an attractive, dashing man.

MR. BRIGGS – Mr. Briggs, a bachelor, is shy, intelligent, and lonely. He decides to rent San Salvatore because he can no longer visit there without feeling his loneliness.

FRANCESCA – Francesca is the overworked housekeeper at San Salvatore. She is volatile, stubborn, and fed up with the crazy English tourists visiting here.

BEPPO – Beppo is the excitable, happy servant. He does all the gardening, heavy labor and carriage driving for San Salvatore's guests.

SET AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

ACT I

Areas for each location indicated by small groupings of furniture and pools of light set in front of the mid curtain. These areas include:

The Women's Club, the Arbutnot's Parlor, the Wilkins' Dining Room, Mrs. Fisher's Sitting Room, Mr. Briggs' Sitting Room and Lady Caroline's Front Foyer. The Boat/Train/Carriage may be a simple bench and stool.

ACT II

Unit set. The garden terrace of San Salvatore. The JCCHS used a turntable for the dining area. The turret wall rotates to a dining area.

ACT I

(The sound of a heavy, steady rain is heard and continues throughout most of the act.

Lights up on the central area revealing a few armchairs, and perhaps an end table. ROSE ARBUTHNOT is sitting reading a newspaper. She does not look up as LOTTY WILKINS comes dashing in, frantically jotting notes in a small journal.)

LOTTY *writing*). To wounded soldier...sixpence. *(She looks around for a seat, takes off her coat shaking the drops of rain off, and looks across at ROSE who is reading the newspaper. She leans in and reads over ROSE's shoulder and gasps in surprise and pleasure. ROSE looks up at her and LOTTY realizes she is being rude. She sits, restlessly, and after a long moment, blurts out...)* Are you reading about the castle and the wisteria?

ROSE. I beg your pardon? Why do you ask me that?

LOTTY. Only because I saw it too, and I thought perhaps, somehow—the advertisement about the castle. It sounds so wonderful, doesn't it? *(She jumps up and points over ROSE's shoulder to the newspaper page. Reading aloud.)* To Those who appreciate Wisteria and Sunshine. Small mediaeval Italian Castle on the shores of the Med-

iterranean to be Let Furnished for the month of April. Necessary servants remain. Z, Box 1000, The Times. Can you just imagine it? It seems such a wonderful thing—this advertisement about the wisteria—and— It seems so wonderful—and it is such a miserable day...

ROSE. Perhaps it seems wonderful because of the miserable day...

LOTTY. I see you in church...every Sunday...

ROSE. In church?

LOTTY. I thought you looked like the paintings of a Madonna, only a sad one, you know, somewhat disappointed.

ROSE. A disappointed Madonna? Really, I...

LOTTY. You were reading it, weren't you?

ROSE. Yes...I...

LOTTY. Wouldn't it be wonderful?

ROSE. Wonderful, very wonderful, but it's no use wasting one's time thinking of such things.

LOTTY. Oh but it is! People think that such delights are only for the rich. Yet the advertisement is addressed to persons who appreciate castles and wisterias, you know, and so it is also addressed to me because I certainly appreciate them, more than anybody knows, more than I have ever told anybody...but...

ROSE. But?

LOTTY. Just considering the considering of them is worthwhile in itself—such a change from this dreary weather and Hampstead—and sometimes I believe I really do believe—if one considers hard enough, one gets things.

ROSE. Perhaps you will tell me your name. If we are to be friends, as I hope we are, we had better begin at the beginning. I am Rose Arbuthnot.

LOTTY. Oh, yes. How kind of you. I'm Mrs. Lotty Wilkins. I don't expect that it conveys anything to you. Sometimes it doesn't convey anything to me either. But I am Mrs. Wilkins. I never really liked that name. Wilkins. It's rather a small, mean name, with a kind of a facetious twist at the end like the upward curve of a pug dog's tail. There it is, however, there's no doing anything about it. My husband is a solicitor. He's...very handsome.

ROSE. That must be a great pleasure to you...

LOTTY. Why?

ROSE (*taken aback*). Because...because beauty—handsomeness—is a gift like any other, and if it is properly used... (*She notices LOTTY staring intently outward.*)
Lotty?

LOTTY (*leaning forward eagerly*). Why don't we try and get it?

ROSE (*faintly*). Get it?

LOTTY. Yes. Not just sit here and say "How wonderful" and then go home to Hampstead without having put out a finger—go home just as usual and see about dinner and fish just as we have been doing for years and years. In fact, I see no end to it. There is no end to it. So that there ought to be a break, there ought to be intervals—in everybody's interests. Why it would really be unselfish to go away and be happy for a little, because we would come back so much nicer. You see, after a bit, everybody needs a holiday.

ROSE. But how do you mean, get it?

LOTTY. Take it!

ROSE. Take it?

LOTTY. Rent it. Hire it. Have it!

ROSE. But...do you mean...you and I?

LOTTY. Yes! Between us. Share. Then it would only cost half, and you look so—you look exactly as if you wanted it as much as I do—as if you ought to have a rest—have something happy happen to you.

ROSE. Why...but we don't know each other.

LOTTY. But just think how well we would do if we went away together for a month! And I've saved for a rainy day, Mellersh insists I save, Mellersh is Mr. Wilkins, and I HAVE saved for a rainy day, and I expect so have you, and this IS a rainy day—look at it...

ROSE. But, Lotty... (*She thinks LOTTY may be a bit unbalanced.*)

LOTTY. Think of getting away for a whole month—from everything—to heaven—

ROSE. You shouldn't say things like that! The vicar...you see...heaven isn't somewhere else. It is here and now. We are told so. Heaven is in our home.

LOTTY. But it isn't!

ROSE (*desperately*). It is there if we choose, if we make it.

LOTTY. I do choose, and I do not make it, and it isn't.

ROSE (*earnestly*). I'd like so much to be friends. Won't you come and see me, or let me come see you sometimes? Whenever you feel as if you wanted to talk. I'll give you my address (*searches in her handbag*) and then you won't forget. (*She hands LOTTY a calling card.*)

LOTTY (*as if she hasn't heard her*). It's so funny, but I see us both—you and me—this April in the medieval castle.

ROSE. Do you?

LOTTY. Don't you ever see things in a kind of flash before they happen?

ROSE. Never. (*She hesitates.*) Of course, it would be most beautiful, most beautiful.

LOTTY. Even if we are wrong, it would only be for a month.

ROSE. That...

LOTTY. Anyhow, I'm sure it's wrong to go on being good for too long, till one gets miserable. And I can see you've been good for years and years, because you look so unhappy. And I've done nothing but my duties, things for other people, ever since I was a little girl, and I don't believe that anyone loves me a bit—a bit the better—and I—oh I long for something else—something else. (*She frantically searches for a handkerchief in her handbag.*) Will you believe that I've never spoken to anyone before in my life like this? I can't think, I simply don't know what has come over me.

ROSE. It's the advertisement, I expect.

LOTTY. Yes, (*dabbing her eyes*) and us being so (*blowing nose*) miserable!

ROSE (*defensively, then calms herself*). I am not miserable! (*Affected by LOTTY's sniffles.*) We must try to live our lives for the good of others if we... (*LOTTY sniffles again.*) We should place ourselves unreservedly in God's hands so that... (*LOTTY raises a tear-stained face to her.*) ...I suppose... (*weakening*) it would do no harm to answer the advertisement... (*LOTTY raises her head, smiling hopefully.*) Merely an inquiry, no commitment. (*LOTTY continues to smile warmly, a ray of sunshine.*) There's no harm in simply asking.

LOTTY. It isn't as if it committed us to anything. It only shows how immaculately good we have been all our lives. (*ROSE begins to write a note to the advertisement*

address.) The very first time we do anything our husbands don't know about we feel guilty.

ROSE. I'm afraid I can't say I have been immaculately good.

LOTTY. Oh, but I am sure you have—I see you being good—and that's why you are not happy.

ROSE. You mustn't say things like that! I don't know why you insist that I am not happy. When you know me better I think you'll find that I am. And I am sure you don't really mean that goodness, if one could attain it, makes one unhappy.

LOTTY. Our sort of goodness does. We have attained it, and we are unhappy. There are miserable sorts of goodness and happy sorts—the sort we'll have at the mediæval castle, for instance, is the happy sort.

ROSE. That is, supposing we go there. After all, we are just writing to ask. Anybody may do that. I think it quite likely we shall find conditions impossible, and even if they were not, probably by tomorrow, we shall not want to go.

LOTTY (*simply*). I see us there.

(Blackout.