

## **Excellent Review in The Book Reader!!!**

### *Dear Friends and Darling Romans*



MARY CHAMBERLIN went to Rome for a three-month vacation, and, after three years, at the height of the Dolce Vita, wrote *Dear Friends and Darling Romans*. She had become—in spite of herself almost—a trenchant observer of things Italian: eating, drinking, births, cats, rented rooms, funerals, grandmothers, motorbikes, *amore*, especially *amore*.

She had made friends with a complete cross-section of Italian life, including a favorite horse. She had noted, with the penetrating gaze of the American Midwesterner, the vagaries of Latin behavior and misbehavior. For contrast, she made a short eventful trip into Yugoslavia.

But this is no flippant pennyweight book; it is a wise and subtle study of the Italians, as compared to the Americans—and vice versa. Mary Chamberlin's Italians are not cliché-Latins, but living, breathing human beings. Her implied criticisms of certain American nervous tics have nothing to do with the dismal wail of the usual ex-patriot. Mary Chamberlin is an extra-patriot, who loves and knows Rome as perhaps only an American ever can.

Her book is brilliantly and unforgettably comic. The case histories of the ladies who have sworn off Latin lovers and founded a society called Italians Anonymous are the sheerest of delights.

If you like a vigorous laugh that trails thoughts in its wake . . . if you are seriously concerned about America and its and how it earned its "place" in the world, this is your book. Even if all you want is to be amused, it's still your book. It is fresh and young and beautifully written, with something in it for everybody.

#### **Trade Paperback**

*Distributed by the Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and Bertram Books (UK)*

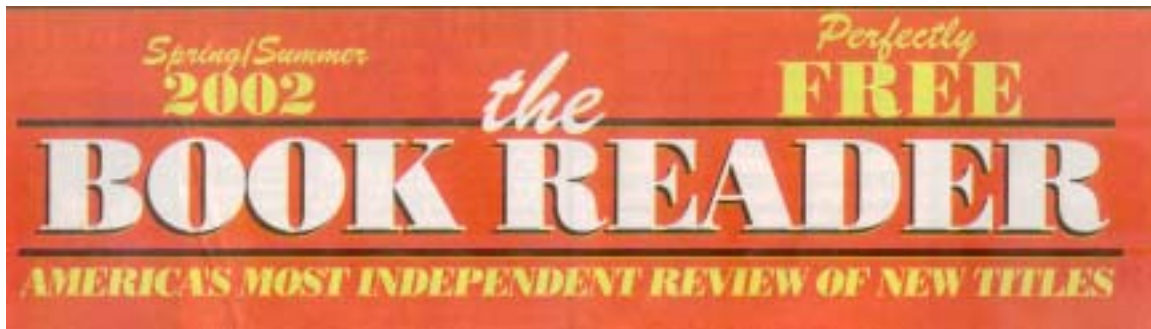
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**Reviewed by**



**“One Italian Romance in a lifetime was enough.”**

DEAR FRIENDS AND DARLING ROMANS. By Mary Chamberlin, illustrated by Nicola Simbari. IDKPress, paper. This beautifully written, elegantly observed book has a history. Author Chamberlin, an American, moved to Rome in 1954 and she's lived there ever since. But three years into her stay, she wrote this book and it was published for an audience of 1950s America. It's reissued now—and it's just lovely. Unvarnished America meets varnished, crazy-quilt, wild Italy. "I was in a country where *Carmen* and *La Tosca* packed the theater, and *Elsie Dinsmore* and *Pollyanna* played to an empty house." She applies for a room to a woman in her late thirties who introduces her to Mamma—together, the two go over recently divorced Chamberlin with the dogmatic eyes of the Catholic centuries. A very human story of a case history of one Elizabeth who came to Italy on a Fullbright, and after a confusing relationship realized: "One Italian romance in a lifetime was enough." Trieste "has the atmosphere of being nowhere more than any place I know." A trip to Yugoslavia results in culture shock as a man viciously beats a horse and everyone accepts the scene as totally normal. "The cries of the horse sounded louder than they had from above. Was there no way to make them understand that the horse's misery was their own..." The men of Italy, romance, a Latin dentist, the entire panorama of Italy and a Mediterranean culture ten times older than America's. An enthralling, wonderfully observed work of art from fifty years ago, rich with color and emotion and packed with intriguing characters. Chamberlin is truly a master storyteller.

## **The Author**

### **Mary Chamberlin**



MARY CHAMBERLIN was born in Lebanon, Illinois, and is a graduate of Monticello College in Alton, Illinois, where she was admitted when only fifteen years old.

She attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City and had a brief theatrical career, terminated by marriage and motherhood.

In 1954, she moved to Rome, where she has lived ever since. She is also the author of *The Palazzo*, published as well by IDKPress, and has written for television, magazines, films, and newspapers.

The script for her award-winning teleplay, *The Ascent of P. J. O'Hara*, is preserved in the archives of the Steven H. Scheuer Collection at Yale University.

## **Dear Friends & Darling Romans Website**

The IDKPress website (<http://www.idkpress.com>) provides additional background on the book, sample text, photographs, reviews, and links to the various distributors and on-line vendors of the books.

## **Bookstores**

Bookstores! *Escape from Paradise* is distributed by The Ingram Group (US), Bertrams (UK), Baker & Taylor (Asia), and Bowker's Books in Print.

## **Other Books Published by IDKPress**

*Escape from Paradise, From Third World to First* by John & May Chu Harding (ISBN: 0971092907)

*The Palazzo* by Mary Chamberlin (ISBN 0971092958)

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## **Excerpt**

I came to Rome to spend three months, and I've stayed three years. I don't live in Rome. I'm an American. I live in America. I stay in Rome. No Americans really live in Rome.

Paris is different. Americans actually do live in Paris. In Paris there are cults for them to embrace, mannerisms for them to affect, dives for them to haunt, causes for them to champion, and movements for them to resist or join. From across the Atlantic, the courses she offers in expatriatism seem complicated and inconstant, but this is simply because of the French flair for embellishment. In reality, they are as perennial and easy to follow as guided tours. Paris is a willing wanton tricked out in dusty pastel chiffon, playing hard to get. Paris only seems elusive. She makes the seduction look like courtship, and moves her man right in.



Rome gets up to no alluring tricks whatsoever. When an American stays in Rome, it happens much the same as when he goes to a cocktail party, promising himself he'll leave after the second martini, and wakes up the next morning to find himself on his host's living room sofa. It wasn't Rome's idea. It wasn't anyone's, including his own.

Although I laid no claims to being an authority, I considered anything but inadequately prepared for Rome. I knew all roads led to it, so that eliminated any problems attendant to boarding the wrong train. I knew that to endear myself socially I had simply to "do as the Romans do." I had a list of "great" restaurants given to me by well-heeled friends who had been here before, and a list of "wonderful little" restaurants given me by low-budget and tightwad friends. I had the addresses of a few people whom I knew, and the addresses of more people I didn't know, and still don't.

Stored away in a cellar corner of my mind were several Latin declensions, and the first sentence of Julius Caesar to help me with the language. Lying near was the memory of a Roman villa carved out of Ivory soap for a project in Latin II, and I recalled with satisfaction that the entranceway was the atrium. Although many Romans now lived in apartments, I anticipated meeting no small number who revered the past enough to have preserved their atriums.

The cells in which I had confined my date, event and personality files hadn't been too thoroughly packed in the beginning, and over the years the contents had rattled around into a state of some disorder. The First Punic War was still behind the Second Punic War, but it seemed chronologically improper for Charlemagne to have wedged in before Hannibal. I didn't like it any better that a clump of late Renaissance painters had exchanged identities and shuffled behind some of their masters, but I wasn't really alarmed. A good guidebook and on-the-spot observation would set things to rights. The succession of the popes I would leave to religious scholars, and those of the Catholic persuasion. It was sufficient that I

approach the Holy City with American tolerance for freedom of worship, and a black mantilla to cover my head in churches as evidence of my deep and solemn respect, and that I depart from it leaving the impression that there are some Americans who consider canned spaghetti precisely as palatable as ground glass.

Faithful to custom, I watched the sun set on my first day in Rome from the Pincio terrace in the Villa Borghese. The obelisk in the great piazza below, the Dome of St. Peter's, and the domes of dozens of lesser churches sparkled as if they'd been struck by magic wands, and then the day burned slowly away from a gold glow through a copper haze and went out behind distant lavender hills. I hadn't known until then that the sun saves all the leftover gold from the day to pour over Rome. Angel trumpeters did not appear from behind the flat, fluffy, pink-white clouds to proclaim the coming of night, but when all the church bells rang out at once, I half expected to see them.



It had taken Rome exactly twenty-four hours to reduce me to a state in which anything seemed possible.

