**Roman Holiday** (1953)

Ranked #4 on the American Film Institute’s list of the 10 greatest films in the genre “Romantic Comedy,” a critical and box office success and winner of 3 Academy Awards for Best Actress (Audrey Hepburn), Screenplay (Dalton Trumbo) and Costume Design (Edith Head), this timeless, light and fascinating classic directed and produced by William Wyler still remains fresh over 50 years after it first appeared.

The joyful fairy tale with the Cinderella theme in reverse begins when Ann, a crown princess of an unspecified country, refuses to endure the stress and strain of her official duties. She escapes the castle while making a goodwill tour in Rome and meets Joe Bradley (Gregory Peck), an expatriate American reporter. Seeing an opportunity to get the scoop of a lifetime, Joe together with his photographer friend, Irving (Eddie Albert), shows Ann the city without revealing who they really are – like Ann, who calls herself Anya Smith. Irving secretly takes pictures while Ann spends a day in anonymity enjoying her freedom. Within 24 hours Ann and Joe fall in love. But the princess decides to go back to her responsibilities. At the news conference on the following day, Joe and Irving, among the members of the press, discreetly let Ann know that her private adventure with them will remain secret.

Experienced with the camera and editing, William Wyler makes the most of the location shooting with several landmarks of Rome, including the interiors of the Palazzos Brancaccio and Colonna. In order to foreshadow the bittersweet ending and the impossibility of their romance, he often pulls his camera back and shows the audience how much larger the city and how much bigger the world, alias reality, is than the couple. Although he is criticized for his humourless approach, the proficient director knows how to get the best out of his actors. Supported by Dalton Trumbo’s observant script with its unaffected, but witty dialogue as well as the economical use of music, the film impresses with understatement and restraint.
Here are some examples:

Ann: I’ve never been alone with a man before, even with my dress on. With my dress off, it’s MOST unusual.

Ann: Is this the elevator?
Joe: This is my ROOM!

Ann: I don’t know how to say goodbye. I can’t think of any words.
Joe: Don’t try.

Ann: Have I been here all night, alone?
Joe: If you don’t count me, yes.
Ann: So I’ve spent the night here - with you?
Joe: Well now, I-I don’t know that I’d use those words exactly, but uh, from a certain angle, yes.

Joe: Life isn’t always what one likes, is it?

In her first major role, Audrey Hepburn shows her infectious zest for life, her incomparable charm and her ability to convey so many emotions through mere facial expressions although this is a modest performance compared to her later works. In an Oscar-nominated role, Eddie Albert, as Joe’s hustling photographer friend, provides broad comedy relief. Last but not least, Gregory Peck convincingly brings a sense of decency to the role when going through the dramatic character arc from an opportunistic reporter to a warm-hearted lover who chastely leads
his love’s interest from girlhood to womanhood. Every time when on screen together, he gallantly leaves the whole stage free for his debutante lady.

If you like romantic stories with unrequited longing and aching restraint, you will find *Roman Holiday* irresistible.