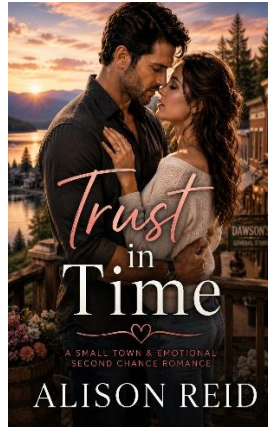


Trust in Time

by Alison Reid



It was Clair's farewell dinner, and the air at the table felt heavy with unsaid words. Her father, Samuel, sat at the head of the table, his eyes glistening with pride as he raised a glass in her honour. Beside him, her stepmother Elizabeth smiled warmly, though Clair knew she was holding back tears. Across from her sat Adam Cross, her father's business partner, a man she had secretly loved for as long as she could remember.

Adam's expression was calm, but his eyes flickered with something deeper each time they met Clair's. He had always been composed, the perfect professional, but tonight was different. The thought of her leaving gnawed at him, though he kept his feelings buried, not wanting to complicate what should have been a celebration. He wondered if she knew, if she had any idea how hard it would be to watch her walk away tomorrow, not knowing if things would ever be the same.

Clair glanced across the table at Adam, her heart pounding in her chest. She had always been good at hiding her feelings but tonight was proving more difficult. Every shared glance, every unspoken moment between them felt charged, but she knew it was too late to confess anything. She was leaving for

college in the morning, and their worlds would drift apart for the next four years.

Still, the weight of her love for him sat like a stone in her chest. She wanted to tell him, to reach across the table and hold his hand, to say all the things she'd been too afraid to say. But she stayed silent, forcing a smile as she picked at her dinner, trying to focus on the conversation between her father and Elizabeth.

Adam's gaze lingered on her longer than usual. He had always admired Clair from a distance, keeping his feelings locked away, especially with Samuel as his business partner. But now, with her leaving, the reality of her absence hit him like a blow. Would she think of him while she was away? Did she feel anything for him, or was he just a figure in her life, another part of her father's world?

As the night drew on, laughter and toasts filled the room, but underneath it all, the tension between Clair and Adam simmered quietly. Both of them, locked in their own hearts, felt the ache of unspoken love and the sadness of an impending goodbye.

She would be home for holidays, but the distance, both physical and emotional, felt vast. Tomorrow she would leave, and both would be left wondering what might have been, neither knowing the other's heart.

As the evening drew to a close, Samuel looked across the table at Adam, a thoughtful expression on his face. The night had been full of laughter and goodbyes, but Samuel wasn't ready to let it end just yet. He knew how fond Clair was of Adam, he had seen the way she looked at him when she thought no one was watching. He had never mentioned it, but he could sense there was something unspoken between the two of them.

"Adam," Samuel began, his tone casual but laced with purpose, "why don't you stay the night? That way you can say goodbye to Clair in the morning before she heads off."

Clair's heart leaped at her father's suggestion, but she quickly lowered her eyes, trying to mask her excitement. She busied herself with folding her napkin, hiding the smile that tugged at the corners of her lips. The thought of seeing Adam again before she left, of one more moment shared between them, filled her with a warmth she hadn't expected.

Adam, on the other hand, couldn't help but feel a surge of happiness at Samuel's offer. He had been dreading the end of the night, knowing it would likely be his last chance to see Clair before she disappeared into her new life at college. "That sounds great," Adam replied, keeping his voice steady, though inside he was relieved, and more than a little eager. "I'd love to stay."

Clair glanced up, trying to act indifferent, though her chest tightened with joy. "That's fine," she said, her voice composed, as if the idea was of no consequence to her. But beneath the calm exterior, she could hardly contain the excitement bubbling within her.

Samuel gave a knowing smile, sensing there was more to their shared silence than either was willing to admit. "Great, it's settled then," he said, standing to clear the table, satisfied that Adam would be around for just a little longer.

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