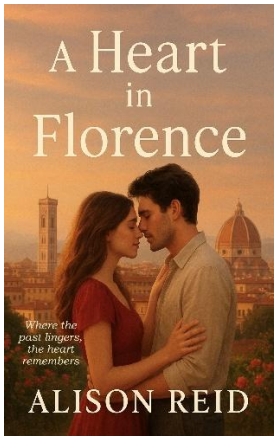
A Heart in Florence

by Alison Reid



The morning after their quiet confessions, Isabella busied herself in the kitchen with Rosa, carefully polishing silverware and arranging fresh flowers for the dining room. The familiar rhythm of her hands—folding napkins, lining teacups, smoothing tablecloths—usually grounded her, but today her thoughts kept slipping away. They drifted back to Lorenzo, to the warmth of his touch, the intensity of his confession, and the unspoken promise lingering in his hazel eyes.

Balancing a tray of polished silver, she moved through the villa's cool corridors, the scent of beeswax and sun-warmed stone drifting around her. She paused mid-step, sensing something shift—the air itself felt heavier. Voices, low but tense, floated from an open door down the hall. Familiar voices. She hadn't meant to stop, yet some invisible force rooted her in place.

"Lorenzo, you need to listen to me!"

The sharp, commanding tone sent a twist through her stomach. Her fingers tightened on the tray. That unmistakable voice—Matteo Caravelli. Her heart lurched as she pressed herself against the cool wall, gripping the silver like a shield.

"Yes, Father?" Lorenzo's reply came polite, controlled, but she could hear the taut thread of tension running through it.

"You need to stop spending time with that girl… Isabella Moretti. She is not suitable for someone of your position." Matteo's words snapped like a whip, each syllable cutting through the corridor.

"That is ridiculous, Father," Lorenzo said steadily, but the frustration beneath his calm was impossible to miss.

"You must understand," Matteo continued, cold and unyielding. "Our family, our legacy… it cannot be compromised." Each word pressed down on Isabella like a weight.

Her knuckles turned white around the tray. Even the sunlight streaming through the windows felt harsh, accusatory, as if the villa itself had turned against her. Her heart thudded with a fragile mix of hope and dread—hope that Lorenzo would stand his ground, dread that his father's expectations might crush not only him but the delicate, tender connection they had begun to nurture.

"I forbid you to spend any more time with that girl. It stops now."

Then came the words that splintered her world.

"She is only a bit of fun, Father," Lorenzo said, a soft, nervous laugh following—a laugh that sliced through her like a blade.

Matteo's response was cruel, contemptuous. "Oh, in that case, good. I am glad you realise a girl like that is for the bed, not the altar."

The words landed like blows. A surge of disbelief, fury, and shame crashed over her, but she stayed frozen, listening, her pulse pounding in her ears. Every syllable echoed down the hall and seared itself into her chest. All she felt was betrayal.

Her hands began to shake violently. She clutched the tray as though it could hold her together, but it offered no protection. Her stomach churned, her legs wobbled, and the world tilted beneath her feet. She wanted to cry out, to demand that the words weren't true—but all she could do was stand there, letting them settle, cruel and relentless, like ashes falling after a fire.

Even the sunlight felt mocking now, the gentle Tuscan breeze a silent accomplice to her pain, highlighting her helplessness. Her throat burned as tears welled and spilled freely. She turned away on unsteady legs, the tray rattling faintly in her trembling hands, and stumbled back toward the kitchen.

Rosa's startled, concerned glance blurred in her vision as she set the tray down with a clatter and fled outside to the fountain, desperate for refuge—for air, for space, for a place where her chest could unclench and her heart might find a rhythm again.

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