

Synopsis - Last of the Summer Vines - Romy Sommer

When workaholic SARAH WELLS inherits her estranged father's vineyard in Tuscany, the last thing she wants is to take time off work to travel to Italy. But when she makes a costly mistake at work, she doesn't have a choice; her boss insists she take all the leave she's never used. Arriving in Tuscany, Sarah discovers that not only is the old *castello* a crumbling mess, but she's not her father's sole heir. In fact, she only has a partial stake in Castello di Sant' Angelo because of a loophole in Italian law. Her father left the vineyard instead to his business partner, TOMASSO DI BIASI – and Tomasso doesn't want to sell.

To make matters worse, the first time she meets Tomasso, not only does she not recognise in this big bearded man her old childhood friend Tommy, but she also hits him across the head with an ancient (and very heavy) iron.

Since Tomasso cannot afford to buy her out, her father's lawyer, GIOVANNI FIORAVANTI, offers a solution: Tomasso keeps the vineyard, and Sarah keeps the *castello*. Which would be a fantastic deal, if it weren't for the fact that the *castello* is practically falling down around her ears. Sarah needs to do some serious work on the house to make it habitable, let alone sellable. Since she has a long, empty, workless summer ahead of her, she decides to stay the summer to fix it up.

Faced with this daunting task, Sarah takes refuge in the one thing that brings calm and order to her life: baking. But when she tries to use the *castello*'s old-fashioned wood stove she nearly sets the kitchen alight. Tomasso arrives in the nick of time to rescue her. Her humiliation at having to be rescued increases tenfold when, as she's sitting in Tomasso's lap, dishevelled and reeking of smoke, the gorgeous lawyer, Gio, arrives to invite her out for lunch. What red-blooded woman could resist, even one as averse to holiday romances as Sarah? But Tomasso sends Gio away, telling her Sarah already has a lunch date – to meet her father's longtime friend, ALBERTO ROSSI.

Sunday lunch with the Rossi family is unlike anything Sarah has experienced before. The big, noisy, overwhelming family is as different from her tiny, dysfunctional family as night is from day, but she immediately bonds with Alberto's daughter, BEATRICE ROSSI, who runs the family's *trattoria*, and when Beatrice offers Sarah a job supplying desserts for the *trattoria*, Sarah agrees.

She might be working harder than she has in ages, clearing out the *castello*'s clutter, cleaning, re-hanging shutters, painting, and baking, but she's also never had so much fun. There are outings to the local market with Beatrice and romantic trips to nearby towns with Gio. The only person she isn't getting along with is Tomasso. From having been playmates as children, they now have an uneasy relationship. Every time they reach a detente, it's one step forward and two steps back.

Sarah learns that Gio's father owns the farm next to theirs, and that he has wanted to buy out her father for many years. When, after Tomasso has given her a tour of the vineyard and seems to

be thawing towards her, she tentatively suggests he sell the vineyard to the Fioravantis, Tomasso explodes. No way will he ever sell to that family! He is dismissive of their wines and warns her off Gio – but she thinks Tomasso is just jealous of the charming and easygoing lawyer.

Soon after, there is sabotage at the cellar – one of the massive oak barrels is damaged, and all its contents are lost. Tomasso accuses Sarah of tampering with the barrel to force him to sell, and she has her own suspicions when Tomasso suddenly hires a handyman to help her with the *castello*. Is he eager to get rid of her, or is the handyman (a terrifying, tattooed ex-con) there to keep an eye on her? Either way, ETTORE, the opera-singing ex-con, turns out to be a godsend – especially when Sarah receives an offer to purchase the *castello* from a German couple. It's the perfect compromise: Sarah can sell the *castello* and return to her life in London, and Tomasso can keep the vineyard. But now the pressure is on: Sarah has less than a month to get the house ready in time.

No sooner is one thing fixed, than something else collapses – like the old wisteria-heavy trellis on the terrace which Tomasso is forced to prop up until Sarah rescues him. And one night there's an unexpected and unseasonal storm which blows a tree onto the roof. In the middle of the night, Sarah finds herself looking up at the stars and the branches piercing her ceiling as rain pours in. Until the roof can be repaired, she moves into Tomasso's cottage.

Since the Germans offered to buy the *castello*, Tomasso no longer suspects her of the sabotage, and the time they spend together in close proximity brings old memories bubbling to the surface, of the last summer they spent together in Tuscany when she was seventeen and heading off to uni, of the stirring attraction between them, of their first kiss.

As the unwanted product of a holiday romance, Sarah is determined never to succumb to one of her own. But just as she realises she's falling in love (and not with the charming Gio!) she finds herself with stiff competition when Gio's friend, FIORELLA, an art restorer, arrives to work on the *castello*'s frescos. Sarah's jealousy of the rapport between the two reaches fever pitch when Tomasso joins them for dinner – having shaved off his scruffy beard.

Tomasso and Sarah attend Beatrice's birthday party. They dance together and sparks fly, but as they're driving home there are far more literal sparks flying – their vineyard is on fire. Through the early hours of the morning they battle the flames until the local fire engine arrives. By dawn, the fire is out. Fuelled by adrenalin and the delicious tension simmering between them all evening, they kiss. And it's even better than the memory of that first kiss nearly twenty years before. Throwing her scruples about holiday romances aside, Sarah is more than ready to take this further, when: Surprise! Her mother, GERALDINE WELLS, arrives with her young Swedish boyfriend in tow.

Yet again, it's one step forward and two steps back. Between the arson investigators prowling the vineyard, the insurance company refusing to pay out, the harvest needing to be brought in, and a lifetime of conflict with her mother reaching boiling point, Sarah has all the excuses she needs to

put the brakes on her developing romance with Tomasso.

Despite the conflict with her mother, they need all the extra help they can get. The clock is ticking – the German buyers arrive in mere days. Sarah hears of a supplier in Siena who has a stock of antique tiles, and she goes to ask for Gio's help to get there – only to find him getting very friendly with the local estate agent.

Tomasso was right about Gio all along – he isn't what he seems, and he can't be trusted.

Instead, Tomasso who takes her to Siena, but the tiles are no longer there, they are in Monteriggioni. Arriving late, they are forced to overnight. Dinner turns into romantic star gazing which turns into... So much for Sarah's rule to never indulge in a holiday romance.

Next morning, when Tomasso mentions the natural water source on their property, Sarah finally puts two and two together, remembering the conversation she overheard between Gio and the estate agent. She realises Gio's father is behind the sabotage and arson, but before she can confront Gio, they are waylaid by the early arrival of the German buyers.

After the incredible night they spent together, Sarah is dismayed when Tomasso turns his back on her, hurt that she still wants to sell the *castello* and return to London. He doesn't give her a chance to explain that she wants to sell the house in order to save the vineyard he loves so much.

On her own, Sarah confronts Gio. Forcing the truth from him makes her realise what she truly wants: not her old life in London, but Tomasso. But she is too scared to go after what she wants. She would rather be unhappy alone in London than risk his rejection, as she has felt rejected by everyone she has ever loved.

On a whim, Geraldine and her Swedish boyfriend decide to marry right here in Montalcino. After the wedding, alone in the *castello* as she packs up the last of her father's belongings, Sarah finds her parents' old love letters. She sits up all night reading, finally understanding how their own hurts caused them to shut her out. She realises that her father, as hurt and rejected as she now feels, cut himself off from everyone – including her.

She accused Tomasso of being just like her father, of loving the vineyard more than he loves her, but she realises she is the one who is more like her father. If she plays it safe and leaves, without risking her heart for love, she will end up just like her father: unhappy and alone.

She heads out into the vineyard to search for Tomasso, and finds him among the last of the summer vines. She tells him she has rejected the offer from the German couple. She wants to stay – for him, if he'll have her. She has risked everything, her job, the security she has craved all her life, to put her heart on the line for him. Her heart in her mouth, she waits for his response. Will he reject her again?

He doesn't. He tells her the words she has always wanted to hear: that she is loved and wanted. They kiss. Cue happy ending.