



# The Italian Cure



Melodie Campbell

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# One

**“Italy!” Aunt Della** yelled over the phone. “Do you have a passport?”

“Yes,” I said. We live in Buffalo. You need a passport to go over the border to shop in Toronto, which is the biggest city around. But what was this about Italy?

“Rome, Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast. Pompeii! Remember that contest I entered last month?” she said.

I leaned back against the deli counter where I worked. “Not exactly,” I said, smiling. Typical Aunt Del. She always assumed you knew everything she did.

My aunt is a widow. She likes to talk on the phone. Okay, she likes to talk, period. And then she said the words that changed my life.

“I won! Seven days in Italy for two. And Charlie, you’re coming with me!”

I sucked in air. “Italy? Are you kidding me?” The land of sunshine, great food and romance? I’d always dreamed of going there.

“Pack your bags. We’re going in two weeks. I’ll clear it with your uncle Vince.” She hung up.

I stared at the phone in my hand. Maybe if I stared at it long enough, other good things would happen.

My older cousin Rickie poked his dark curly head out from the back room. “Who was that on the phone?”

“Aunt Della,” I said, looking up. “She just won a one-week trip to Italy, and she’s taking me!”

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Rickie laughed. “You and Aunt Del, together for one week solid. Are you sure about that?”

I stared at him.

“Remember last year at my wedding when she did cartwheels across the dance floor?” he said. “And when she challenged the ushers to a chugging contest? And won?”

“She’s a character.” I smiled, thinking of that reception. I remembered what she had told me afterward: *Why be boring?*

But Rickie had a point. Was this crazy? We’d never been away together before. Sure, I had spent time with her and Uncle Joe at their house. They didn’t have any kids of their own. She used to take me for overnights when I was young to give my parents a break. I’d always felt special and much loved in those times.

“Earth to Charlie,” he said. “You okay if I open up now? It’s nearly time, and people are outside waiting.”

“Okay,” I said. “But can you hand me that roll of cash-register tape up there first? I’ll need it pretty soon.” I pointed to the shelf above the back counter.

Rickie reached up with one hand easily. “Sucks to be short,” he said.

“Great things come in small packages,” I shot back.

He grinned as he handed me the roll.

It was true. I’d give a million bucks to be four inches taller. Not that I have a million. And that would just make me average height.

I thanked him for the tape and slipped back to the cash register. Rickie unlocked the glass door. Then he joined me behind the counter to serve customers.

My name is Charlotte, but everyone calls me Charlie. I work in my uncle Vince’s deli as a cashier. So getting time off work wouldn’t be a problem. Aunt Del would simply tell her younger brother that I was going to Italy

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with her. I grinned at that. Aunt Del is bossy. She is also colorful and kooky. I love her dearly. Heck, I once wanted to *be* her when I got older.

However, living with her in a hotel room for a week was something I had never done. Should I be worried?

I smiled at the customers traipsing in. What the poop. A free trip to Italy? I was going!



## Two

**The night before** our flight, I got out my apple-green suitcase. It was an old thing, handed down from my aunt when she got a new set. It was soft-sided and a little battered. But it would do. It had wheels, at least, and a pull strap on one end.

I set about finding things to fill it with. And as I did, my mind wandered.

I didn't like to admit it, but Italy had been my dream honeymoon spot. For years I had collected posters and travel brochures of Rome. They were still in the bottom drawer of my dresser, waiting for the day.

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I never got the honeymoon. Rob left me after seven years of dating. We even lived together for the last two. My parents weren't keen on that. But Rob thought we should try living together before we got married. He even used the word *married*.

Three months ago, things changed. *He* changed. It wasn't fun anymore, he said. At first I was shocked. I didn't understand. Then I came to realize he was having fun with someone new.

He moved out. At first I wanted to die. Now I had progressed to the stage where I wanted *him* to die. The low-life cheating bastard!

Not only did he rip out my heart. There was also the apartment. He left me with rent I could barely afford to pay. It certainly didn't allow me to save up for trips.

I continued to pack, all the while thinking about the future. My parents had suggested that I move back home temporarily. They were

great parents, and I loved them. I could save money if I didn't have this blasted rent to pay. But moving back to my childhood home would be like admitting defeat.

I didn't want them to see how devastated I was over Rob. For lunch and dinner visits, I could cover it up. But if I lived with them...

Also, I knew they were using my old room for Carrie's special equipment. Carrie is my sister, seven years younger than me. Something happened when she was born. She uses a wheelchair and goes to a special school. She's sweet and loyal and very pretty. I couldn't have a nicer sister. The last thing I wanted to do was inconvenience everyone by moving back home.

Carrie and I talked to each other by email every night. It was our way of closing out the day. She told me her struggles, and I shared my woes with her. Emailing each night made us feel closer than when we had actually

lived in the same house. I didn't want that to change, and I knew she felt the same way.

My cell phone rang. I knew from the ring-tone that it was Aunt Del.

"Here's what I'm taking," she said. "Three pairs of pants, two jackets—one for good, one to wear on the plane over a sweater. We need to layer, because it will be cold here when we leave and warm when we land in Rome. Let's see what else. Several tops and two dresses that pack well. Walking shoes, good shoes and sandals. And don't forget a hat!"

"I won't," I said. Two dresses that packed well? I didn't wear dresses to work. The only dresses I had were for family occasions like weddings and funerals. I'd pack a few summer skirts instead.

"It will be fun sharing this with you," I said. I was missing having someone to share things with. That was the worst part. You came home at the end of the day with lots to

talk about, but there was nobody there to talk to anymore.

But it was more than that. And Aunt Del could always read my mind.

“You’re a bit lonely now,” she said. “And I don’t mean just because the stinking turd left.”

I smiled. Aunt Del never held back.

“That’s true. We did a lot of things as a couple, with other couples,” I said. “They don’t invite me on my own.”

Aunt Del sighed. “Yes, that’s the trouble. A newly single woman isn’t always welcome in a group where everyone else is married or part of a couple. People feel uncomfortable. I know all about that. When Joe died, the invitations dried up. I had to make new friends.”

That was my problem. I needed to make new friends.

She continued. “What you’ve been through is worse in some ways. Friends have to choose between one person or the other.

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If they want to still hang out with the turd, they feel uncomfortable seeing you too. So they choose.”

“Rob was the exciting one,” I said, feeling a lump start in my throat. “It’s no wonder they chose him. I’m boring.”

“You’re not boring!” she said. “You’re nice and kind and dependable. Look how you are with Carrie. Those qualities are worth more than you can imagine.”

To be honest, I wasn’t feeling very nice at the moment. Bloodthirsty was the word that came to mind. I kept imagining our old couple friends with a new person in their lives. Rob’s new girlfriend.

“Remember,” said Aunt Del. “With every end comes a new beginning.”

We said good night and hung up. I continued packing.

Aunt Del was a dear. I knew she was trying to make me feel better. And to be

truthful, I was over the worst of it. But oh, I missed being in a couple.

That wasn't all. I had no confidence in myself anymore. It had all been such a shock. I didn't see the breakup coming. There must have been signs, but I didn't see them. I'd thought we were good.

Could I ever trust my judgment again?

Someone, somewhere, needed to invent a cure for the broken heart.

Snap out of it, I told myself as I clicked the suitcase shut. In less than twenty-four hours, I would be in Rome. *Rome!* And a new adventure would begin.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is born of love. It shimmers with my love for Italy, where we still have family. How I enjoyed going back with my mother to the places described in this story. Those places sing in my memory.

More love: I lost my husband, Dave, to cancer this year. He was one in a million. No one could have been more supportive to me as an author. All through the writing of this book, I was remembering the way our love began. In the last chapter, you will read this: "Then you came here, and it was like the sun came out." Dave said that to me long, long ago. In all the years since, it has seemed to me the most beautiful thing a man could say to a woman. Charlie feels that way too.



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Winner of 10 awards, MELODIE CAMPBELL has been both a finalist for and a winner of the Derringer and Arthur Ellis Awards for crime writing. She has over two hundred publications, including a hundred comedy credits, forty short stories and several books in the Rapid Reads collection, including the Goddaughter series. Her work has appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, *Star Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Canadian Living*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and many more. Melodie lives in Oakville, Ontario.



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