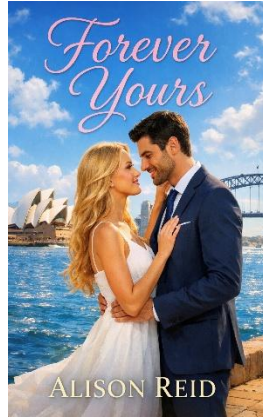


Forever Yours

by Alison Reid



Andrew and Kathleen stood in the bustling bar area of an exclusive club, the hum of conversation and clinking glasses creating an ambient buzz around them. Andrew couldn't help but feel slightly out of place. It wasn't that he didn't enjoy the scene; it was just that after years of high-powered meetings and corporate dinners in New York, the laid-back atmosphere of Sydney's nightlife felt like a distant memory.

His attention flickered back to his old schoolmates, George and Bryan, who were leaning against the bar, chatting animatedly. Kathleen had insisted on this reunion, bringing him to the same club where she was meeting her friend for drinks. Andrew couldn't remember the last time he'd had a night out with these guys, and honestly, the thought of catching up with old friends made the evening feel more nostalgic than thrilling.

George suddenly let out a low whistle, breaking Andrew's thoughts. "Whoa, look at that woman who just walked in. What a bloody stunner."

Kathleen didn't even turn around. She rolled her eyes and smirked, clearly used to George's over-the-top commentary. Andrew, however, couldn't help but look. Along with Bryan, he turned his head to follow George's gaze.

Striding toward them was a tall, drop-dead gorgeous woman. Her long legs were accentuated by a sleek green silk dress that hugged her curves in all the right places, but it wasn't overly tight—just the perfect fit. The dress swished as she moved, her confidence radiating through every step.

Bryan let out a low whistle. “I wouldn't mind getting to know that. What do you think, Andrew?”

Andrew raised an eyebrow, glancing at Bryan before responding, “No thanks, I'm over beautiful women.”

Kathleen shot him a worried look. “You can't think all beautiful women are like Sarah, Andrew,” she said softly.

Andrew's expression hardened at the mention of Sarah. That chapter of his life—the one he had left behind in New York—felt like a distant memory now, one he had no intention of revisiting. Not tonight. Not ever.

Instead, his focus shifted to the woman making her way toward them, her confident stride impossible to ignore. There was something about her—something that made his pulse quicken. A strange familiarity nagged at the edges of his mind, but he couldn't quite place it.

“Oh great,” George muttered under his breath, grinning. “She's coming this way.”

Kathleen turned with an amused laugh, nudging George playfully. “Down, boy,” she said. “That's my friend Celeste.”

Andrew blinked, his brow furrowing as he did a double take. Celeste?

“That's Celeste?” he asked, disbelief creeping into his voice.

Kathleen chuckled at his reaction. “Yes, Andrew. She's no longer a lanky teenager.” She waved enthusiastically toward Celeste, who lifted her hand in return—graceful yet composed, a picture of quiet confidence.

Andrew's gaze lingered on her as she neared them, his mind struggling to reconcile the memory of the awkward fifteen-year-old with the woman standing before him now. The years had reshaped her in ways he hadn't anticipated. Gone was the lanky teenager he barely remembered. In her place stood a woman who radiated confidence, elegance, and a quiet kind of power that was impossible to ignore.

A sudden, unwelcome realisation settled in his chest. He was attracted to her. And he didn't like it.

Beautiful women were trouble. He knew that better than anyone. They came with expectations, demands, and the ability to destroy a man's life if given the chance.

And Celeste? She was stunning. Which meant she was dangerous.

Bryan, unable to contain himself, murmured, "Oh, I think I'm in love."

Kathleen laughed, shaking her head. "That's what all men say when they meet Celeste."

Andrew barely heard them. He was still trying to reconcile the woman approaching them with the distant memory of the lanky teenager she used to be. She carried herself with effortless grace, her confidence evident in every step. And when she smiled—warm, genuine, dazzling—it was impossible to look away.

"Well, well, well," Celeste said, amusement lacing her tone as she stopped in front of him. "Look who it is. Andrew Carter, back in Sydney after all these years."

Before he could react, she leaned in—just close enough for him to catch the faintest trace of her perfume—then pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. A fleeting touch, barely there, yet it sent an unexpected jolt through him.

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