

# New Year's Eve Kiss

by Alison Reid



Then he saw her.

She didn't simply walk into the ballroom—she transformed it. Every head subtly shifted, every conversation paused for a fraction of a second. She moved like someone unaware of her own impact, which only made her more irresistible. Tall, elegant, effortlessly statuesque, she glided through the room with a mixture of grace and intention that captivated him instantly.

Her strapless, floor-length gown—royal blue silk—clung to her with an understated sensuality. The fabric shimmered under the lights, the high slit offering glimpses of a long, toned leg with every step. The fitted bodice hugged her slender waist, highlighting her curves with tasteful sophistication. A sapphire-and-diamond necklace rested against her graceful throat, the gemstones catching the light like captured stars.

Her golden-brown hair cascaded in soft waves, framing a face that looked almost too beautiful to be real—smooth, luminous skin; high cheekbones flushed with natural colour; a delicate nose; and lips shaped for temptation. But it was her eyes that held him—deep blue, startlingly expressive, brimming with warmth, intelligence, and something else he couldn't quite name.

He didn't know her. But she had his absolute attention.

She approached the bar, ordered a drink, and downed it in one swift, confident motion—though Marcus noticed the faint tremor beneath her composure. Something had rattled her.

Moments later, a man appeared beside her, tense and earnest. Marcus heard her name in the exchange: Emily. And it was immediately clear the man was her ex—or about to be. The pleading tone, the desperate eyes, the faint slur of alcohol. Marcus watched as Emily handled him with poise and precision that rivalled a seasoned diplomat. Her voice was cool, controlled, cutting without ever raising in volume. She dismissed the man with a mixture of strength and grace that made Marcus's admiration sharpen into something deeper.

This woman wasn't just beautiful. She was formidable.

Then, as if she felt him watching, Emily turned her head.

Their gazes collided.

Her lips curved—not shy, not polite—but warm, knowing, subtly provocative. A smile that slid under his skin like a spark. A smile that said she had noticed him long before he realised he had been watching her.

Heat shot through him. Controlled, measured Marcus felt his pulse shift.

Setting his glass down, he crossed the room toward her with slow, deliberate strides. People stepped aside without knowing why; Marcus had always carried an aura of command. But now, his entire focus narrowed to the woman waiting at the bar.

When he reached her, he extended his hand, his voice low, smooth, warm.

“Hi,” he said. “I'm Marcus.”

She placed her hand in his, her skin soft, warm, sending a jolt up his arm that he felt far too deeply. “Hello,” she replied, her voice a gentle melody with an undercurrent of confidence. “I'm Emily.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Emily,” he said, his thumb brushing lightly—intentionally—against her hand as he held it just a moment longer than necessary.

Her smile deepened.

And Marcus, a man who planned everything, suddenly knew one thing with startling certainty:

He wasn’t leaving this party anytime soon.

Emily slid onto the barstool, the silky fall of her gown settling around her legs. Marcus took the seat beside her, turning his entire body toward her as though she’d become the only thing in the room worth looking at. When his thigh brushed the warm, exposed skin revealed by the slit of her dress, the contact was brief—accidental—but it sent a quick, undeniable jolt through him.

She caught the flicker in his eyes and gave him a rueful, slightly embarrassed smile. “Sorry about that scene,” she murmured, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “I didn’t mean to provide the hotel with entertainment.”

“Are you okay?” Marcus asked, his voice low, warm, and edged with concern that felt startlingly genuine.

“I’ll be fine.” She gave a small, self-deprecating smile. “He’s not worth worrying about.”

Marcus studied her for a beat, tilting his head as though trying to read more in the set of her shoulders, the steadiness of her breath. “Was that your husband?”

Emily laughed—light, melodic, a sound that made his chest tighten. “Oh God, no. Thank goodness. Just a boyfriend—now ex-boyfriend.”

Her eyes lifted to his, sapphire bright and slightly searching. “Are you waiting for someone?”

“Yes,” he said without hesitation, a cheeky, irresistible grin breaking across his face. “You.”

Emily raised an eyebrow, feigning surprise even as her lips curved. “Were you now?”

Marcus leaned in, the scent of his cologne—clean, masculine, a hint of amber—slipping around her. His voice dropped to a low murmur. “You’re absolutely gorgeous.”

Heat rushed to her cheeks, but she didn’t look away. “Mmm. I was just about to say the same thing to you.”

He laughed, a deep, rich sound that slid over her skin like silk, leaving a shiver in its wake.

“Can I call you Marc?” she asked, tilting her head. “Or do you prefer Marcus?”

“You can call me anything you like.” He lifted his hand, brushing his thumb lightly across her bottom lip.

Emily’s breath caught. Then—bold, wicked—she extended her tongue and grazed the pad of his thumb, never breaking eye contact. A slow, burning tension coiled between them. Marcus’s breath hitched audibly, heat flaring in his chest—and lower.

She slid her hand over his, fingertips tracing idle, teasing patterns across his knuckles. “Well then, Marc... you can call me Em.”

“Em,” he repeated, tasting the name, letting it linger on his tongue. A slow smile unfurled. “I like that.”

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