



*Romancing the  
New Year*

*A collection of stories  
inspired by one photograph*

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## [PG Forte](#)

### **The Start of Something Wonderful**

That strip of bare skin across Kristi's back—the one that appeared in the gap that stretched between the hem of her shirt and her pant's waistband whenever she bent to get something from beneath the bar, as she was doing right now—had been driving Tony crazy all evening. Just like she'd been doing to him since the day they met. Working this New Year's Eve party together—why had he ever thought that was a good idea?

Oh, yeah. The money—which they both needed. And the chance to spend a little extra time with her. Perhaps even the chance to sneak a kiss at midnight.

That hadn't happened though. When the balloons had dropped, just a couple of minutes earlier, they'd both been far too busy pouring drinks and making sure everyone's glasses were topped off for the thought to even enter his head.

Another missed opportunity; just the latest in what was becoming a disturbingly long line of them. He wasn't usually this reticent, but something about Kristi had him acting out of character; had held him back. It was just a New Year's kiss. Harmless. Meaningless, even. But that was precisely the problem, wasn't it? Because whatever else their first kiss should be, it shouldn't

be meaningless.

Obviously, this was not a consideration shared by the majority of tonight's party-goers, who were all kissing for all they were worth. Especially that one couple on the other side of the bar. They'd locked lips even before the final ten-second countdown had begun and if they'd come up for air any time since, Tony must have missed it. All around them, people continued to celebrate the new year with toasts and smiles and kisses...

"Hey, bartender, can I get another round over here?"

...all except for the old man who sat alone at the end of the bar. nursing his porter Tony had no idea what the man was doing here tonight. Why come alone to a New Year's Eve party? Why sit by yourself and drink alone all night?

"Bartender?" the man repeated.

"Yes, sir," Tony replied. "Right away."

But getting the man his drink meant passing behind Kristi, who was still bent over the bar. And that was a problem because all Tony could think about was how it would feel to stand so close behind her, to slide his hand up her back beneath her shirt, and hold her there, her body pressed flush against the polished teak surface of the bar. He could imagine the look of surprise on her face as she'd turn to look at him, the flare of heat in her cheeks, the way desire might darken her eyes...

*"Tony. What are you doing?" she'd ask, her voice breathless, eager.*

*"Don't move," he'd say, using his other hand to tug at her pants; so curious to discover what type of underwear she had on.*

A thong would be hot but after watching her work these past hours he doubted that was the case. Wouldn't the strap be visible with her bent over the way she was, her tempting derriere on display? Maybe a pair of bikini panties then...but, on second thought, surely there would be lines, wouldn't there?

He glanced again at Kristi's upturned butt. Could it be...?

*"Going commando?" He'd raise an eyebrow, put on an expression of shocked disapproval.*

*"Have you been a naughty girl this year?"*

So, okay, the year was, technically, only a couple of minutes old. He was at least a week late for the whole naughty or nice thing, but how could he resist the temptation she represented?

*He'd push his hand into her pants, cock hardening even more with her soft, encouraging moan. His own breathing would be uneven as his fingers moved deeper, seeking the wetness that would let him know she was enjoying this game as much as he was.*

*She'd wiggle her ass, as though she were trying to get away, but her fingers would be clenched on the edge of the bar. She'd rock her hips, pushing herself more firmly into his hand with every motion until he was palming her mound; until his fingers were sliding back and forth over slick, wet flesh. He'd lean in even closer then and whisper, "Do you need a spanking?"*

*At that she'd gasp. "Tony, not now. There are people watching!"*

Well, that was a given. People would be watching them. Like those two at the back of the room. The ones who hadn't once taken their eyes off that couple near the bar who were *still* kissing. People would definitely be watching.

*"Let 'em watch," he'd murmur, stroking harder.*

"Hey! Buddy," the man at the end of the bar barked suddenly. "Think there might be an outside chance of me getting that beer some time this year?"

Tony started, coloring as he was jerked back to reality. "Yes, sir," he replied, shaking his head in an effort to clear away the fantasy.

He headed for the cooler where the beer was stored. "Behind you," he said as he passed Kristi, his voice so thick with lust he barely recognized it.

She straightened abruptly and collided against him as she took a startled step backward. Her hair, and the scent of her fragrance tickled his nose and he reached for her without thinking.

"Careful," he cautioned, instinctively taking hold of her hips to help her regain her balance.

"Tony." She craned her neck to glance up at him, arching her back a little as she did, so that her butt brushed against his groin. He groaned softly. A faint flush colored her cheeks. As she stammered, "S-sorry. I guess I must've...I mean, I didn't see you there."

"No problem," he said with a weak smile. Impulsively, he leaned in and kissed her cheek. "Happy new year."

"To you too." Kristi turned in his grasp and pressed against him, planting a kiss on his lips that seemed every bit as heated as the ones he'd been imagining. "A *very* happy new year."

Oh, yeah, baby, Tony thought, the old man and his beer forgotten now. But, just as he was about to pull her closer, Kristi pushed out of his grasp. "No," she whispered. "Not now. We're working."

Not now? Tony grinned. "So...you're saying...later then?"

Kristi's cheeks flamed hotter. She flashed a wicked look as she spun around and bent down again to reach into the beer cooler. "Maybe," she said as she passed him the beer he'd come to get.

The hell with that. Tony shook his head. “Definitely,” he corrected. Then he brushed his lips against hers and turned away once more.

Another couple of hours and this party would be over. Theirs would be just beginning. The New Year was already off to a great start.



## Sandra Sookoo

Loud, thumping club music echoes from the speakers. The strong beats thump through my chest so I feel every reverberation of the drums. Bodies ebb and flow around each other on the dance floor, bouncing off each other like atoms, spinning off into new directions to interact with new connections. I glance around, shivering in the air conditioning. The place stinks of too much cologne and perfume, topped off by alcohol and mixed with desperation—the typical New Year’s hookup game.

Wow, looks like a hopping party, but dang, I’m parched. No strong drinks for me tonight. I’m after a ginger ale since I’m driving. If only I hadn’t promised to drive my silly friend home, and so help me, if she pukes in my car, I’m leaving her at the bus station. Man, it’s so crowded here I can’t make it to that gorgeous wooden bar. Nothing else to do but hang back here and people

watch. I wish they'd make this an Olympic event. I'd so rock it.

Hmm, check that couple out, kissing like the world's gonna end in two minutes. Boy, it looks like he's trying to give her a full tonsil inspection his tongue's going so deep. Well, she's welcome to Mr. Slobber. If I need to be frisked, I'll contact the airlines.

Moving on. Let's see. The person in the unfortunate gray, shapeless jacket/shirt. Spending another New Year's alone, are we? Just as well. I have a feeling you're a shape shifter and trying to make peace with your true identity. Pride to the furies!

Oh crap! Hold on. I lost my footing on one of these stupid balloons that are all over the place. Didn't the party planner get the memo balloons are harmful to the environment? Not to mention latex allergies. Geez, there are other people, get a clue!

Okay, back to the party. Right in front of the necking twins, what's going on here? I wonder if these kids will hook up. The guy's not bad looking—if you overlook his vampire tendencies. I have a feeling he's sizing up faux tan girl as his next meal instead of his next life partner. Just as well. Faux tan's got some miles on her it seems. Next time, moisturize and be happy with a natural glow!

And the bartender is nowhere to be found. I suppose if I were him, I'd try to ignore this loosey goosey crowd, too.

Sigh. What's the deal with the gal in the pink top? Is she carrying around nail polish or an illegal cigarette? Now that would kick the party into high gear, wouldn't it?

Doesn't look like I'm gonna make it to the bar tonight. Might as well scope out an empty chair and pop my e-reader out of my purse. Time for a good book to keep me company.



## Rhonda Print

Our tongues danced together and I reveled in the taste of Justin, and, more importantly, the sweet taste of victory.

Finally! I thought to myself and quivered in anticipation. By the time Justin opens his eyes and realizes that he has just sealed his fate, and fulfilled my destiny, it will too late.

Too late for his pathetic girlfriend, Chloe; well ex-girlfriend, thanks to my meddling; to reclaim Justin and definitely too late for Justin to withhold his power of sight from me any longer.

I cracked my eyelid open, just enough to see Alicia and Elijah, toasting in the New Year, one that would have solidified their place in this dominion had I not been able to secure Justin and his gift as my bloodslave. It is too late for them too.

And Artemis, poor misguided Artemis. He sat at the bar alone, holding his glass of scotch securely in his hand. The last drink he would ever imbibe.

In moments the final bell will strike, heralding The First Year, 1/11/11, my year. The lights will be swallowed by darkness. Then Artemis' blood too will be shed. I'll open his carotid artery with my fangs and swallow every drop, savor it as his blood pulses into me, the warm power

seeping into my own veins.

I felt the muscles in Justin's neck twitch at the same moment that the sensation crept down my spine. Shit!

My eyes flew wide, searching the crowd for the only two people on this planet that could ruin me.

Blackness.

Then a sliver of light, just enough for me to see the blood.

Only it wasn't me swallowing Artemis' precious blood. It was my blood, flowing crimson down my chest as I lie in the back room of the bar with only a window to show me the outer room. The outer room where Alicia and Elijah stood flanking Artemis. Bear and Mouse, ever the faithful bodyguards, protecting them all.

And Justin, embracing Chloe. Damn!

"How did you know?" I turned my head back as far as I could, still only able to see a small portion of Ian's face. Leah stepped into my view and then I knew the answer to my own question.

"It was of no use for you to try and separate us." Ian shared a look with Leah that I could only guess at. "It doesn't matter who tries." He kept his eyes on her as they swirled blue-black with pinpoints of light blazing in them. "It cannot be done. We are bound together."

Leah sighed. Whether in defeat or acceptance I could not tell.

"Besides Victoria." He flashed a sinister smile, exposing his own fangs. "I could smell your evil stench anywhere." Ian turned those dark eyes back on me. They would likely be the last things I ever saw. Unless--

The lights flickered...



## Olivia Brynn

“Can we go home now?” Jennifer checked her phone again. William should be calling any minute. She really didn’t want to be in a noisy bar when he finally did.

“We can’t go home yet.” Christine dragged Jennifer and Alex across the crowded dance floor toward the bar. “We have to at least wait until midnight.”

“If I miss William’s phone call because you two kept me prisoner at a stupid bar all night, I’ll never forgive you.” Jennifer pouted, but her jutting lower lip was lost on Christine, so she turned to Alex for help. “Can’t you control her?”

“Control her?” He grinned. “I can barely keep up. See why I love her?” Alex’s eyes went to Christine’s ass as they wended through the throngs of people.

“Which makes me a third wheel. Why don’t you distract her, and I’ll call a cab?”

“William will call back if he can’t reach you the first time. Quit being such a stick in the mud.” Christine faced them in a relatively clear spot near the bar. “He’s probably bringing in the new year with his buddies anyway.”

The new year came hours ago in Afghanistan. He didn’t get to celebrate.” Jennifer tried her pout again.

“I promise, once that ball drops in Times Square, you won’t want to rush home to wait for a phone call.”

“Don’t bet on it.”

“I’ll put my life savings on it.” Christine winked at Alex, whose lips twitched in a suppressed smile.

Jennifer watched the couple curiously. Something was going on. “No deal. Your life savings is paying for my next drink.”

Christine laughed. “Yeah you’re right. That’s why I’m dating this Sugar Daddy.” She walked into Alex’s embrace, careful not to spill their champagne.

Jennifer couldn’t watch. As much as she loved Christine and her boyfriend Alex, seeing them together almost every day only made her long for the relationship with William that she’d had to put on hold when he was called for duty. He was supposed to be home for Christmas, but as usual, government snafus delayed his discharge. Now she hoped he’d come home by Valentine’s Day. Jennifer pulled her gaze away from her feet to find Christine and Alex still lost in each other. Maybe she could walk home...

Alex was the first to come up for breath. “Get yourself another glass of bubbly. Only two minutes to midnight.”

Grateful for the excuse to leave the loving display, Jennifer found an empty stool at the bar where a man was leaning. As she waited for the bartender to make his way over, Jennifer took a deep breath. Damn. The stranger beside her wore the same cologne as William. Jennifer bit her lip, and swore to breathe through her mouth until her drink arrived. Was it her imagination, or did the entire bar get suddenly quiet? She snuck a glance at the man’s hands then up his suit jacket until she reached his face. When she met his eyes, she blinked. It can’t be.

“William?”

“Happy New Year baby.”



## Alanna Coca

Cindy glared at her brother and his fiancée. “Would you two knock it off? If Greg and I are going to hook up, it certainly won’t be with you two around.” The man in question had leaned over the bar to order another beer. Camilla and Carson had been playing matchmakers for months. They’d finally managed to get Cindy and Camilla’s brother Greg in the same place at the same time. From the beginning of the New Year’s party, they’d been pushing their siblings into conversation, and even using the open bar as a tongue-loosener.

“You have to admit, Cin, the guy is perfect for you.” Greg poured another glass of champagne for Camilla before emptying the bottle into his own glass. “Hell, you two haven’t stopped talking since the party started.”

Cindy watched Greg, and more specifically, the brunette at the bar that inched closer as Greg waited for his drink. “Yeah, he’s a good guy.” And cute. And both mentally and financially stable. And interesting. And he smelled good...

“I can vouch for him,” Camilla winked. “As a matter of fact, I can give you some great dirt about his formative years.”

Cindy fiddled with her plastic orange armband. She would never admit to either Carson or

Camilla that she'd been attracted to Greg since they met at their siblings' engagement party last summer. She'd even awoke from a few dreams starring Greg. The fact that they'd finally connected during this New Year's party was only giving her more hope.

"You'd better get another drink. They're about to count down to midnight." Carson shoved her toward the bar.

Cindy went along with the ruse, because she secretly wanted to wedge herself between Greg and the brunette.

"Good luck getting a drink," Greg leaned over to speak directly into her ear, though the bar wasn't loud enough to warrant it. "They're pretty busy."

"Ten...nine....eight..." The entire bar started to chant.

"Oh no!" Cindy covered her mouth in mock surprise. "But I have to have a drink for the toast. How else can I bring in the new year?"

"...five...four...three...two..."

"How about this?" Greg spun her into his arms and covered her surprised mouth with his.

Cindy slipped her arms around his back and opened her mouth to his marauding tongue, and she barely heard the crowd shouting, "Happy New Year!"



## J. Hali Steele

### One Drop

She'd had the dream for months.

Lynn watched him walk across the noisy bar filled with clinking glasses, paper blow horns, and the drunken strains of Auld Lang Syne. Her body trembled as he approached, not in fear -- in anticipation.

"You knew I'd come for you."

Weak with desire, one word slipped past her lips, "Please..."

"You belong to me," he whispered.

Light was blotted out as he bent to cover her mouth with his. The points of his teeth pierced her lip, and he sucked the spot greedily until his tongue nudged for entrance. Lynn opened like a flower, accepting him, tasting the blood he'd licked from her lips.

Sounds from the boisterous crowd slipped away.

When he released her from his embrace, they stood naked in the middle of a large, well-appointed room. Wood blazed in the fireplace and candles glowed from every surface, casting an eerie light over the stone walls. A sumptuous bed rested in one corner, heavy antique furnishings sat around the space.

A bottle with no label stood in the middle of a small table, condensation dripped down its sides.

**Note: J. Hali Steele ended up going on to complete the scene above, and submitted it to Whipped Cream for their [Thursday Free Erotic Short Story](#).**

**Check it out!**



## PG Forte

### One to Remember

The cacophony of cheers with which the New Year had been rung in had finally begun to subside. There was still some singing and a few couples continued to kiss, but most of the glass-clinking, horn-blowing, noisemaking appeared to be over. *About time*. Mitch stared into the depths of his drink and wondered why he'd come here. Here, of all places. Another New Year's Eve. Another Auld Lang Syne.

There'd been a song with lyrics like that, hadn't there, once upon a time?

Lyrics and melody teased at the edges of his memory, but he couldn't bring them into focus. He never could, with things like that. Carl would remember. He'd remember everything—the year, the song, the singer, where they would've heard it.

If Carl were here with him tonight, seated on the empty barstool beside him, he'd roll his eyes and smile. "Of course I remember. Why don't you?" He was always so amused by all the many details Mitch could not recall. Amused, and maybe a little frustrated.

Funny thing though, Mitch could always remember when it counted, even Carl had to admit to that. Things like his birthday, his favorite flower, what he'd been wearing the night they met, right here, in this very bar. And, of course, all their little anniversaries as well—the day he

proposed, the day they married, the day Carl was diagnosed...

Mitch's hand clenched tighter on his glass. "Hey, bartender, can I get another round over here?" he growled, even though he wasn't yet finished with the drink in his hand. Even though he'd promised himself he would take it easy tonight.

That was the whole reason he'd gone out, wasn't it? So he'd be forced to stay sober enough to drive himself back home. So he'd be forced not to drink too much. If he'd stayed in...all bets had been off. He might have drunk himself into a stupor by now—probably would have, in fact—which wasn't what Carl would have wanted him to do.

"Bartender?" he repeated, when the other man failed to respond.

"Yes, sir," the bartender replied at last, although his eyes remained focused right where they'd been these last couple of minutes—on his co-worker's very shapely butt. "Right away."

Mitch cast an appraising glance at the other bartender. Nice. Very nice, actually, he thought, letting his gaze linger just a little while longer. In fact, if he were a few years younger, or into women...but he wasn't. He took another sip of his drink. The chances were good that later tonight, after the revelers had all gone home, the two bartenders would be getting it on; stripping off each other's clothes, perhaps laying each other right here on the bar...

"Sounds familiar," Carl would have said, eyes sparkling as he leaned toward him, voice lowering until it was just a whisper—the kind that always went straight to Mitch's groin. "Sounds almost like something we might have done when we were that age."

Mitch smirked. Almost? Was it possible Mitch remembered something Carl didn't? "No, sweetheart, it sounds exactly like something we did. And more than once."

The sound of his own soft chuckle stilled him. Oh, God—had he said any of that aloud? Mitch swore under his breath as he glanced around, mortified at the thought of having been seen talking to himself, but no one seemed to have noticed his slip. Not that anyone was actually close enough to have heard him, come to think of it, other than the brunette a couple of seats away, just putting her cell phone back in her bag. Mitch wasn't positive, but those looked like tears swimming in her eyes.

Now wasn't that a damn shame? She was far too young and pretty to be crying alone on a New Year's Eve. *It's just another night, girl*, he wanted to tell her. *It's nothing special. It's just a night like any other night.* But maybe that was the problem, right there? If you were alone, all the empty nights were pretty much the same, weren't they? At the end of every day, all you were left with were your memories.

But at least he had those.

Say what you like, Mitch thought, but he'd had it good. He and Carl—they'd had a good life together. And he had some nerve remembering it like this: drinking alone in the bar where they'd met, getting weepy and morose. Although, come to think of it...he wasn't doing all that much drinking, was he? That damn bartender was still standing stock still, staring at the girl with a pole-axed look on his face. Was that boy *ever* going to make his move?

"Hey! Buddy," Mitch called, barely suppressing his grin. "Ya think there might be an outside chance of me getting that beer some time this year?"

That got him moving. The kid started, coloring as he was jerked back to reality. "Yes, sir," he replied, finally heading in the right direction.

The other bartender cast one more surreptitious glance in her co-worker's direction and then straightened suddenly, coming to her feet just as he was passing behind her.

Nice. Mitch nodded approvingly as they kissed. And about damn time.

"It is, isn't it?" Carl's voice seemed to whisper in his mind once more. "Time to move on, to start over. It's a new year, you know."

Yeah. Mitch sighed. So it was.

At long last the bartender returned, sliding a fresh drink across the bar to Mitch. "Thanks." Mitch nodded, gesturing toward the other end of the bar, where the female bartender was still plying drinks. "And, hey. Good luck with that."

His bartender's eyes widened in faint surprise. Mitch grinned. Damned if the boy wasn't blushing. "Uh, thank you." He stammered uncertainly, before moving away.

Once the boy's back was turned, Mitch lifted his glass in a small toast to the empty seat beside him. "Here's to you, sweetheart. Happy new year."



## Xakara

Alia leaned over Jordan's shoulder and smiled as dark molasses waves tickled her cheek. She scanned the digital camera screen and let out a sigh of relief. She hadn't been got caught in the photograph. Great, but that had been too close, it was time to duck out before the inevitable happened.

"Happy New Year, Beautiful!" Jordan turned and kissed her on the cheek. He lifted the camera. "I confiscated it to check for you, we're good. And Clark is drunk enough that he won't notice if I keep the camera. If anyone asks we can say you were sitting in the chair in front of Jess when they kissed. She'll never know the difference." He looked at the picture again. "I mean damn, is Matt trying to lick her tonsils?"

"Well it is Matt. Maybe he's got a thing for tonsils." She kissed his cheek in return and stepped back. "I should head out. You have everything in hand here and cabs will be scarce in an hour."

"No, you can't leave yet." He slipped the camera into his pocket and took her hand. "Our time zone is coming up next, you've got to stay til midnight."

She looked down at their hands, avoiding his eyes to make it easier. "We've done five New Year's countdowns already. I think I've got the gist of it."

"But it was brilliant to start the countdown in Paris and move through the time zones! I've kissed five different people and the ball hasn't even dropped in Times Square yet." He pressed

their clasped hands to his chest. Even in the bar lighting his olive complexion was made paler against her dark vanilla bean skin. “You’ve got to stay until it’s ours. It’s not New Years until it’s New Years in New York.” He gave her puppy dog eyes and pulled her into a hug. “Please, for me? Kyle, Mark and Linda already bailed on me. Like always you’re the only one I can count on.” He leaned and whispered. “Not to mention, you’re all I’ve got left before I’m stuck with only a bar full of people I’ve never slept with and who are therefore less entertaining to be around. I’m sure there are city codes against that happening.”

Alia pressed her forehead to his shoulder and laughed. “That is the most ridiculous thing you’ve said today—and you’ve thrown out some gems!” She lifted her head and smiled at him. “If I stay you’ll want to hit after parties and I’m not up to that.”

Jordan pursed his lips. “Not even if I promise it’ll be a small, private gathering talking about books and projects for the New Year with nary a drink in sight? Afterwards we can grab a cab back to the condo and I’ll come up and make you breakfast. French toast, you know you love my French toast.”

“I think Kyle might be expecting you to come home before we get to French toast.”

Jordan shrugged. “If he cared what time I came home he should have stayed to make sure I got there. Just one more countdown and we’re gone.” He pulled her closer and kissed the curve of her ear. “Only you would stick out five hours in a bar for me when you don’t even drink. Give me one more hour until the ball drops and I’m yours until you want to get rid of me, promise.”

Alia’s body tensed. “You know better, Jordan. You should be careful what you promise.”

“Why? You’ve been my forever since you pulled me out of Lake Meade when I was fourteen.” He leaned back and looked into her eyes. “You haven’t changed since the day I crossed out of the darkness and looked up to the most beautiful face I’ve ever seen.”

“You were dying, that makes you biased.”

A smile stole across his lips. “Very biased, it was my first kiss too.”

“It was CPR.” She corrected.

Jordan shook his head. “It was a kiss for me and it sealed my fate, as they say.” He ran his hand over her hair and captured a curl. “I’ve always known what was coming. I’ve always known I’m just on loan to the rest of the world and I wouldn’t have it any other way.” A grin broke free. “So I’ll promise anything I damn well please because I mean it.”

Alia’s throat constricted. “You know, don’t you?”

Jordan kissed her forehead. “I figured by starting with Paris and going all the way to Los

Angeles, I can get in a good nine New Year's celebrations. Seems like more than enough to carry me through. By the time I start to miss this kind of thing, I'll be able to come back."

"Jordan." She touched his cheek.

"No, don't. Don't make it sad. I'm not sad, Alia, I'm excited. I'm a Vegas kid and I bet on you a long time ago. I've been waiting for this since I opened my eyes on the lake's shore and realized my life wasn't over but just beginning." His squeezed her arms and bounced on his heels. "Just promise that we'll go back to Lake Meade. That we'll take a boat out under the stars and do it there; a whole dramatic, full-circle moment."

She kissed him, slow and deep. "I wouldn't have it any other way." She stepped back and took his hand. "Come on, let's get you another celebration hook up."

"Wait what's the plan?"

Alia pointed to the bartender taking a seat at a table alone. "His replacement showed up five minutes ago. I know you only picked this place to see him so I'm going to get you talking and make sure he's your midnight kiss."

A dark chocolate laugh rumbled up from his chest. "Best. Wingman. Ever."

The introduction and starter conversation took moments and soon Alia slipped away to the main bar across from where everyone clustered to watch the television at the smaller drink station. She settled on a stool and ordered cranberry juice, sipping the tart beverage as she watched the two young men inflate their acquaintanceship with the assistance of liquid courage and an air of celebration. By her second drink a midnight kiss was assured and some forty-minutes later they'd practiced several times while she spoke with other friends throughout the bar.

She took a quiet moment to herself and smiled into her glass. The smile faltered as a wave of intimate heat washed over her and her body grew tight and moist.

"They look cozy."

Alia closed her eyes as the honey and bourbon voice slid over her skin. "Aamon. I've been expecting you." He ordered a drink and settled on the stool beside her, bringing the scent of open spaces, primordial places and sex beneath the stars. "You took longer than I thought you would."

He sipped his drink. "It took me longer to work up the nerve than I'd like to admit to." He stuck his hand into the inner pocket of his worn leather jacket and pulled out a palm-sized velvet box. "I got you something. It's not much but I thought you'd like it."

She spared a glance for Jordan and took the box. The brighter lights near the main bar gave a sparkle of gems that shone like Mediterranean seas. "Tourmaline and?"

“And green sapphire, all in silver fittings. I found the raw gems in Tokyo a few years back and thought of you. I didn’t figure out what to do with them until last month. I had it made at that little shop in Sedona you loved when we wintered there. The teardrop cut is still your favorite right?”

Alia stared at the choker a long moment. “Aamon.”

“You’ll wear it won’t you?” He reached out and caressed the curve of her neck with the back of his hand. “You came out unadorned, seems a shame to let it go unseen with such a lovely canvass to show it off.”

Alia stood and faced him. “Of course I’ll wear it. I’d never turn down a gift from you, Aamon.” She handed him the box and turned around, lifting her hair. “And yes, the teardrop cut is still my favorite.” Strong hands slipped around her throat and centered the choker in place. “It’s beautiful, thank you. Happy Anniversary, My Love.”

He let his fingertips glide across her shoulders and down her arms. “Happy Anniversary, Beloved.” Aamon embraced her from behind and held her close. “I didn’t know if you’d want me to come. You’re replacing me with a younger model after all. What is he, twelve?”

She slapped his hand where it rested around his waist. “He’s twenty-four. He’ll miss his twenty-fifth birthday by three days but it can’t be helped. I’ve given him every day of the ten years to decide and he’s made his choice, there’s no more time.” She turned in his arms. “Why wouldn’t I want you to come? I’m not the one that wanted you to leave.”

Aamon traced her lower lip with his thumb. “I’m the one that needed space. The one that wanted to run free, I know. But that just added to the thought I might be unwelcome. That you might want your time with him to be...yours alone.”

“He wants to meet you.” She reached for his face and stopped, caressing the collar of the leather jacket instead. “I’ve told him a lot about you.”

He brought both her hands to his face. “And he still wants to meet me? Brave kid.” He tried to smile but it faltered. “Is he the one? Will he close the circle?”

“He’s one and that’s all that matters.”

The crowd started to count down to the ball drop. Aamon startled but turned his attention back to Alia. “Does that mean you’ll come with me after the change?”

She looked over to Jordan as he snuggled up to the bartender and nodded. "I think he'll like that. He's always wanted to travel." She smiled back at Aamon. "And your each other's type so it should work out well. We'll adorn the rooftops of the world."

The countdown reached one and the bar exploded into applause and song. She leaned in and bit Aamon's throat with tiny fangs as he did the same to her. The sharp tang of blood zinged through her body along with the soft, distant scent of stone made flesh. They had just under three months before the transformation and then her new Guardian would be ready to stand against the darkness and become a force of light; devoting the decade of life it would take to become a true Stone Warrior. Until then, he had a few more days of freedom ahead and with Aamon's arrival, more sultry endeavors to pursue.



## Stacey Kennedy

Shouts of excitement and dreams of the year to come drifted through the air around Marcus. A couple next to him rang in the New Year with a marriage proposal. But he didn't have love on his mind.

His focus stayed on the woman who just clinked glasses with him. The soft curves of her body, the gleam of desire in her eyes, all promised him a night of pleasure.

He answered that promise with one of his own. A slow smile spread across his face to declare that he shared an equal burn and his groin tightened in response. Tonight was about starting fresh, discovering new things, and he could hardly wait to feel her warm flesh beneath his hands. To make her squirm, pant in unadulterated need, and to hear the soft purr of his name rush from her mouth. His gum's burned to release his fangs. Yearned to sink into her neck and fill his mouth with delicious blood. Oh yes, a Happy New Year indeed.

## Rebecca Zanetti

They'd saved the universe. Not a bad day for a princess on the run and the dethroned king of a dimension she'd never heard of.

Kendra clinked her glass against his, thrilled beyond belief about the couple kissing next to her. They'd be all right...tonight they'd get busy and create the child who would go beyond quantum physics and disprove the big bang theory. Saving all worlds in the process.

"I didn't think we'd make it," Mal telepathed into her head, his dark gaze appraising and his smile remaining in place for any spectators.

"I told you we'd succeed," she thought back, the cheering crowd energizing her.

His smile slipped. "The woman...she's stubborn."

"The woman?" Kendra ground her teeth together. "You mean the schmuck who couldn't commit was stubborn."

"Schmuck?" Mal took a sip of his champagne, surveying the room. "I do hope you drop this world's colloquiums when we move on."

"We?" Oh no he hadn't. One night together, no matter how spectacular, didn't create a partnership. Of any kind. "There's no we, king. We're done." His dark eyebrow rose.

"Wrong. We're just getting started."



## [Gem Sivad](#)

*Ten... nine... eight... seven...six...five...four...three...two...one! Happy New Year Everyone!*" The countdown finished, the clock struck midnight, and all hell broke loose among the party-goers at Church's Bar and Grill.

When the band started playing *Auld Lang Syne*, Marty swept Holly along, dancing her toward the corner spot next to the bottled water machine. She clung to his broad shoulders as he maneuvered them adroitly past the kissing and laughing revelers to his destination. "I staked out this place earlier as ours," he growled in her ear. She held on to him as he took her mouth in a kiss that fuddled her already alcohol-hazed brain. They breathed as one and she concentrated on the feel of his tongue in her mouth moaning softly as desire for more flooded her senses.

"You're hot for it, aren't you?" he asked. "I'm going to make you come for me, Little Bit." Holly grinned inside at his pet name for her. At five foot ten in her stocking feet, it took a man Marty's size to dwarf her, but at six foot six, he did. Then she realized what he'd said, and answered him primly, "Don't be silly, Martin Jones, we're in a public place."

As usual, he ignored her sentiments and held her there plundering her lips, until the only sound she heard was his whispered sex words and promises for later. She felt his hand caressing her thigh, sliding up above the silk stockings as Marty murmured gruffly, "Burn for me, sweetheart."

Holly's breath hitched as the feel of his hand jarred her into sanity. It was climbing steadily, a gliding heat that slid beneath the slit of her dress and crawled upward as he watched her out of hot chocolate eyes flecked with gold.

Deliberately, he slid his hand farther up her leg cupping her mound. He grunted with pleased surprise when he felt her bare flesh. "God yes," he groaned. "Naked and ready for me." Holly moved against his palm, savoring his touch, forgetting for the moment they were surrounded by people partying. Marty nipped her lower lip and murmured, "Spread your legs."

Reality prevailed, and trying to step away, she said, "No. People will see."

In spite of her protest, Marty kept her close, working his finger between the folds of her sex as he coaxed her into submission.

"No they won't, sweetheart, I've got you covered." And he did, literally. Marty's broad shoulders blocked her from the eyes of the other dancers. They leaned against the wall of the dark corner, talking for all anyone knew. At least that's what she told herself. *It felt—she felt—his touch was exquisite.*

"You're wet for me." He nuzzled his way up her neck, across her jaw to catch her lip, sucking where he'd earlier nipped; then he pulled her even closer, plundering her mouth while he added a thumb to his lower exploration.

Her breasts itched to be handled but he ignored them, instead concentrating his touch on her clit. He circled it, brushed across it, pinched it, and teased it, all the time squinting down at her through the hazy darkness--until--until--until she was panting and ready to throw her legs around his waist and say 'to hell with anyone watching'.

Holly pulled her lips from his long enough to whisper, "This is utterly decadent." But, her traitorous arms wrapped tighter around his neck as her hips followed his teasing hand. She murmured, "We should stop," right before she gave him her mouth again.

"Not...quite...yet..." Marty arched his palm, thrusting a finger into her channel, at the same time he pinched her sensitive bud.

Stars, strobe lights, fireworks, and a kaleidoscope of colors overwhelmed her senses. If he hadn't captured her cries beneath his lips, every dancer in the place would have shared her climax.

Holly grabbed Marty's shoulders, riding his skilled fingers until her body shuddered and pulsed with aftershocks.

Eyes closed, she slumped against him, boneless and aware that he was quietly laughing. His hand stroked lovingly across her quivering flesh, petting her as he savored her release before saying smugly, "Happy New Year, sweetheart. Will you marry me, Holly?"



## Sayde Grace

Fate was such a bitch. There was no other word for the screaming woman trying to bust Josephine's ear drum. Tired of it, Josephine hit the tiny red end button on her cell hoping like hell the lonely man beside her, drinking his New Years night away hadn't heard. Fate would call back but oh well. Josephine needed another drink. And so what if Providence had ran away and currently had her tongue thoroughly shoved down some guy's throat. Who cared? Hell the kid needed to get out and live before she was forced to take over being the next Fate. But oh no, the present Ms. High and Mighty-Stick-Up-Her-Ass-Fate wouldn't stand for it. Well too damn bad, it was New Years and someone needed to have a little fun. If that meant Providence got to kiss a

stranger in a room full of people than so be it. At least one of the two of them was being kissed thoroughly.

A vibration beside her drink alerted Josephine that her moment without Fate's banshee like voice was gone. She glared down at her phone hating that if she didn't answer it Fate would just screw something else up in Josephine's world. She'd always heard never to piss off Fate but really, she'd always assumed it was just a joke between mortals since there was "supposed" to be rules setup to keep Fate from meddling. Unfortunately it wasn't a joke. A pissed off Fate was a completely screwed Josephine.

Sighing she snatched her phone from the bar and hit the little green button that would drown out the party around her.

"For the love of Delphi have you found her yet?" Fate's high pitched scream rang in Josephine's ears.

She glanced at her vodka wishing beyond anything that it was some deep southern Louisiana moonshine instead. Vodka just didn't have enough alcohol to soothe her werewolf/vampire nerves.

Josephine cleared her throat. "I've found her. Now remind me once again why you couldn't just spin her life thread to bring her back? Why did you make Griff drag me away from my reunion honeymoon? As you recall Braxton and I should be on a beach in Fiji trying desperately to bring the werewolf population up." In fact just the thought of it sent a flare of scorching heat through Josephine. Damn but she missed her mate.

"Because if you hadn't encouraged Providence to be strong and do what she wanted with her life she would still be in the Hall of Omens training to be the next holder of futures. Instead she ran away and refuses to come back."

Blah, blah, blah. Josephine wished she could feel bad that a daughter had run away from a mother but she couldn't. Providence was supposed to be the next holder of the future but if she never lived then would she give a damn about the future she was supposed to protect? Josephine doubted it. Still, if Providence had just stayed for another week Fate wouldn't have went psycho and caused the females in the pack to go into heat at the same time creating a mating frenzy that could alert the world to the existence of the Mag Mell. Poor Braxton was up to his eyeballs in estrogen as he tried to control the females, he was sorely pissed off too. No amount of sex would soothe him at this point. He'd also told Josephine to tell Providence to accept her destiny and stay.

"And if you hadn't meddled in the mate bond structure Providence wouldn't have guessed

she could now take a mortal as her mate.”

All true. But the young girl had looked at Josephine with huge pitiful blue eyes that begged for life. She hadn't been able to stop the pep rally speech which spilled from her that night. And honestly she'd do it again just to see Providence truly happy for a moment. But now that moment was over and it was time they all went back to their lives.

Enough was enough. “Oh shut up Fate. I said I had her. We'll be back before you know it. And it's not my fault you never let the kid breathe without you okaying it. Maybe, just maybe if you'd let her have some normal fun she wouldn't have ran off like a crazed werehyena in heat.”

Josephine knew she was pushing Fate beyond what she should but she couldn't help it. Instead of listening to a promise of more bad things heading her way Josephine hung up, again. She turned to grab the six foot tall, playboy bodied, blonde Providence. But there was no Providence behind her. Only another sickening horny couple stood clinking their champagne glasses together stood where she'd been. Damn, the kid had run again. Josephine's New Year was so screwed.



# Lisa Fox

## A NEW YEAR'S WISH

The ball in Times Square had just dropped and inside the bar there was one, colossal uproar. Champagne toasts and midnight kisses, drunken promises and tears of nostalgia, people laughing and circulating, everyone celebrating the beginning of 2011.

Kelly knocked aside the balloons and reached into the cooler for more champagne. She bent forward, digging deep inside to retrieve the dwindling supply of bottles.

“Stay just like that,” Josh, her fellow bartender, and current bane of her existence, called over the music. “And we’ll both have a *very* happy new year.”

Kelly just rolled her eyes and ignored him. She was beginning to seriously regret sleeping with him. Sure, he was hot and whatever and he did have a *massive* cock, but the personality... Ugh.

She made the mistake of glancing over at him and he gave her those weird sex eyes he’d been flashing her all night.

Completely not in the mood to deal with him, she pulled a bottle out of the cooler and turned around, scanning the bar for any glasses that needed refilling.

Everyone seemed pretty well occupied, the people sitting at the bar had full drinks and the blond yuppie couple was still doing their best to devour one another. She felt a little twinge of envy when she noticed that the dark-haired guy she thought was hot was immersed in conversation with another woman. They looked very cozy indeed and Kelly was certain that he was going to totally score tonight.





In fact, it looked like just about everyone in the bar was going to get laid.



Except for her.



She glanced over at Josh and instantly banished the thought. No, no, no. No matter how lonely she was, she was *not* going to encourage him.

But she did want someone to kiss.



To hold.



And she thought that if she could have just one wish, just one single New Year's wish, she'd wish for her white knight to come through those doors and sweep her off her feet and worship her like a goddess and be able to maintain an erection for more than three minutes and want to hold her in his arms after hours of exhausting and exhilarating pure, animal fucking and bring her breakfast in bed and love coffee and old movies and most importantly *her*.

In other words, the impossible dream.

Kelly laughed aloud and shook her head at her own silliness.

She held up the champagne bottle, ready to pour more drinks when an icy chill licked the back of her neck, sending an almost sensuous shiver racing down her spine. On instinct, she glanced toward the doors and the breath caught in her throat



when he walked into the bar.



## Savannah Chase

### The Countdown

Only sixty seconds left till the clock strikes midnight Tom saw as he glanced at his watch. The New Year was almost here, and it signaled a time for him to make some changes.

Tom tossed his apron under the counter next to the sink and made his way out from behind the bar. He grabbed his suit jacket just as he rounded the corner and started to make his way into the crowd. For the next few moments the drinks would have to wait.

“Ten seconds left,” he heard someone shout from the other side of the bar.

“Ten”

“Nine”

“Eight,” the whole bar shouted.

He pushed his way through the crowd. His eyes set on her, the woman he’d pined for since the very day she’d started to work at the Halo Pub. Now it came time to stop wanting and do something about it.

“Seven”

“Six”

“Five”

Christina turned in his direction just as he reached her. The sparkle in her blue eyes tugged at every part of his heart. Those were the eyes he fell in love with.

Without a word he reached for her hand and wrapped his fingers around her. With the other he cupped her face.

“Four”

“Three”

“I can’t tell you how much I’ve wanted this. I’ve wanted you for so long,” he said as he leaned in and whispered it in her eyes.

“Two”

With one last glance into her beautiful eyes he captures her lips. Their bodies collided. She welcomed his kiss, didn’t shy away. Her arms wrapped around him, pulled him closer with her hand on the back of his neck. She deepened their kiss. Her tongue explored his mouth just as he delve his own tongue into her sinful mouth. She tasted sweet, and so addictive. For a brief moment they were all alone. No bar full of patrons drinking, singing, cheering.

Every part of him wanted more of Christina. Her lips, her kiss and her body, and most important he wanted all of her heart. To show her just how badly he wanted her, and how much her very presence affected him.

“One”

“Happy New Year,” the whole crowd yelled.

He could hear the dinging of glasses beside him, cheers and celebration around him, but all he focused on is the woman in his arms. It was the beginning of another new year, but this time it held something special, the woman he’d wished for.



## Virginia Cavanaugh

*What a New Year this had turned out to be.* Megan Grimes repressed the sigh that rose up inside her as she waited for the glass of champagne she'd ordered from the bartender. A dark haired woman sat on the barstool in front of her, looking as about as thrilled as Megan felt. *Yep, just two more members for the lonely club this year.*

The bartender had a cuteness about him and had even winked at her after taking her order, but he wasn't Kyle Smith. This time the sigh escaped her lips as she thought about the man who'd become her boss a little over a month ago. She had felt an instant attraction to him when they were introduced and recently she'd had the feeling he felt the same way. But her secret side life put the brakes on pursuing any type of relationship with him.

A couple to her left exchanged heated whispers, distracting her from her inner pity party. Both were blond, attractive and clearly irritated with each other. As their disagreement picked up a notch in volume, Megan made out the words *mother, dinner, and I don't want to.* She rolled her eyes. *Really people, it's New Years Eve, minutes before midnight and you want to argue about*

*having to go to her mom's for dinner tomorrow.*

If only she could have their problems. Instead she got to be a witch whose mother would curse any man less than a full blooded warlock if she brought him home. Nope. Suzanna Grimes would have no less for her only daughter, even though Megan had argued with her several times about it. Warlocks were very rare. It had something to do with genetics. Her mom had tried to explain it to her once, something about the way color blindness effected more males than females, but the charmed gene effected more females than males. All Megan had heard at the time had been she couldn't date David Janson in high school and that had sent her right into pissed off teenage tune out.

The bartender held out her glass with a smile and she accepted it as the couple next to her began arguing in earnest. Multiple voices chimed in as the verbal countdown to the New Year started. "Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Happy New Year!"

Auld Lang Syne sung by the mass filled the air as Megan finally had her fill of the arguing couple. She waved her hand in their direction as a few words in the old language came from her lips along with "Make up already," in English.

The blond man pulled the blonde woman into an embrace and covered her lips with his. Megan hid her smile with the rim of her champagne flute. *Much better. At least someone would be getting lucky tonight.*

"Megan," a deep rich voice called out to her.

She knew before she even turned more fully to the left who had called her name. A tingling of awareness traveled over her body as she looked at Kyle Smith, who had extended his glass toward her in toast. She extended hers as well, trying to shake off the effect his presence seemed to always have on her. He still wore the blue button up shirt and dark coat he'd worn at the office today. She figured he must have worked late as usual. His dark hair fell across his forehead in casual disarray that worked for him. The smile spreading across his face caused butterflies to flutter inside her lower belly.

He closed the distance. "I'm so happy I asked your personal assistant where you planned to be tonight."

She felt her brows lift slightly as she stared at him. Had he really cared what her plans for the evening had been? "Well I'm glad you did too," she replied unsure what else to say.

He leaned in closer. "In fact I think I am going to give your personal assistant a raise."

She gave a half laugh. "I'm sure she will be overjoyed with the news, but I hardly see why

finding me by myself in this bar is reason for a raise.” As he came closer she found herself closing her eyes. She could feel his breath on her neck and then his lips next to her ear. She bit into her bottom lip.

“Because if I hadn’t found you at this exact moment I would have never known,” he whispered.

Surly he wasn’t talking about the little bit of magic she’d just used. “What would you have not known?”

Megan shivered as he pulled back from her and gestured to the couple by them, who had surpassed kissing, and moved into a full on make out session. The blond man’s hand slid down to squeeze the woman’s backside. Megan winced as she realized she might have transferred some of her own longing into her spell. But that’s what she got for not clearing her mind first. All that aside, why had he indicted the couple? She turned to face him, but didn’t get the question out.

“I think we might want to tone down the lust a bit though. No need for these two to go to jail,” he whispered as he gave a small wave of his hand in the couple’s direction.

She watched as his lips formed the words in the old language only loud enough for her to hear. The couple pulled back slowly from each other and caught their breath. Megan couldn’t help but to stare. No way had that just happened. Another smile appeared on Kyle’s face, but she dared not to hope. Her gaze moved to her champagne glass. Yeah, she’d had a few drinks before this and her ears held that pleasant warm feeling, but no way had she drunk enough to imagine this.

“I can see you’re in shock. Why don’t we take a walk,” Kyle suggested as he plucked the flute from her hand and sat it along with his on the bar.

She let him steer her out of the bar and into the crisp night air. Gooseflesh appeared over her arms and legs and she shivered, wrapping her arms around her waist. Most of the snow had melted leaving them a clear path to walk across the road and into a small park. He draped his coat around her shoulders, still warm from his own body heat. The smell of his cologne mixed with the familiar scent that was unique to him. She found herself turning her face into the collar and taking a deep breath. Could this really be happening?

He halted her steps with his hand at her elbow, turning her to face him. “Megan I wanted to say something sooner, but I had to be sure. When I hired you I had a feeling you were charmed. But day after day I noticed you didn’t use magic, and I had decided tonight I no longer cared. I wanted you whether or not you were charmed. But when I saw you do that spell I...I can’t tell you

how happy that made me.”

She placed her hands on his chest as he slid his arms around her. The muscle beneath her hands felt solid and warm. Her gaze rose to meet his as a smile spread across her face as well. “I can’t believe it. You’re a warlock. How did I miss it?”

“You didn’t.” He pulled her closer and brushed a dark strand of hair behind her ear. “I could see your attraction to me in the way you looked at me. In a way, your own magical side had been trying to tell you all along.” His head lowered.

She felt his heated breath caress her lips a second before he closed the last bit of space between them. His lips were soft against hers and she found herself parting her own a moan as he slid his tongue into her mouth. Spirals of need coiled inside her as she tilted her head back, allowing him to deepen the kiss. His embrace tightened and he pulled her flush against his body. She whimpered as he pulled his lips away from hers and she barely made out the words as he spoke them against her lips. A mist began to form around them as she realized he’d recited a transport spell. Then a feeling of weightlessness overtook her and she clung to him as they floated to the destination he’d chosen.

The mist cleared and she found herself standing in a very masculine bedroom that held his scent. As he pulled down the zipper of her dress she had one last fleeting thought. It would be only one member for the lonely club, because tonight she was getting lucky.



## Marcia James

### *A Romantic Resolution...*

"Happy freakin' New Year," Mike muttered.

He knocked aside balloons to fill two more flutes of champagne for the revelers crowding his bar. What the hell was wrong with him? He'd racked up record sales tonight at High Spirits, the combination pub and wine shop he'd launched three years before in San Francisco's Mission District. Being firmly in the black, however, couldn't dispel his bad mood.

Three feet away, the lovers swabbing each other's tonsils were a bitter reminder of his own lousy love life. Mike's gaze tracked to Cindi, the reason he wasn't celebrating the arrival of 2011. His sexy part-time bartender was bent over the credit card machine, ringing up the check for booth five. Cindi's "tramp stamp" -- a ridiculous term for the cute Chinese crested puppy tattoo on the small of her back -- was clearly visible as her black t-shirt rode up from her black jeans. Seeing that damn dog always made Mike's mouth go dry.

He'd hired Cindi ten months ago, enjoying her wry wit and -- when she wasn't looking -- her subtle curves. They'd become great "buddies" and nothing more. Mike's lip curled in disgust. Just what every straight male wants -- to be a beautiful woman's platonic friend. But, dammit, he hadn't imagined the erotic currents generated every time their hands met pulling drafts and mixing drinks.

So why hadn't he tested that attraction? Sure, he was her boss, and she'd needed the job to help her through her last year at Stanford. No way was he chancing a sexual harassment charge. And Mike's hesitation had nothing to do with his fear of being rejected, he told his inner Dr. Phil. Just because his feelings for her might be unrequited...

His eyes followed Cindi as she dropped off the credit card slip and wished the couple a happy New Year's. Tonight was her last at the bar, thanks to getting her Masters in early December. She was joining a thriving Haight-Ashbury pet psychology group on Monday. Cindi Benton, canine shrink.

"Go for it, you idiot." Barry, the bar's version of Norm from *Cheers*, urged. "But before you do, give me another Boilermaker."

Mike bit back his instinctive, "Butt the hell out," and filled the order. Barry was his best customer, despite his tendency to offer advice. Besides, the guy had just verbalized Mike's own thoughts. His tempting employee was wrapping up her last shift. It was tonight or never.

Cindi circled the bar and stood close enough for Mike to smell her clean, citrusy scent. She

noded toward the couple bent on setting a face-sucking world record. "Are you superstitious? I read that New Year's kisses bring good fortune." She turned, lifting her gaze to his. "Especially if you kiss someone you love."

His heart literally stopped, then twisted in his chest and kicked into high gear. He *had* to be dreaming. But her "dare you" grin spoke volumes, and she sealed the deal by licking her full, pink lips.

Mike yanked Cindi flush against him, their bodies fitting like an erotic puzzle. Her arms circled his neck as he took her mouth. *Yes. God, yes.* She was sweet and spicy -- an addictive taste he'd always crave. The room tilted, sounds blurred, and his world shrank to this one moment, this special woman.

His hands slid from her hips to her back, tracing her dog tattoo as they surfaced from the kiss minutes, or was it hours later. Her eyes, darkened with want, met his as she teased, "If a kiss brings good luck, imagine what some long, hard lovemaking could do."

2011 was going to be a *damn* fine year.

*The preceding stories were posted on the authors' blogs during our*

## *Romancing the New Year Blog Hop*

*on January 1, 2011.*

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