



Mystical

By

Yolanda Sfetsos

Mystical by Yolanda Sfetsos

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Mystical

Copyright© 2009 Yolanda Sfetsos

ISBN: 978-1-60088-446-7

Cover Artist: Melissa Findley

Editor: Leanne Salter

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

Cobblestone Press, LLC

www.cobblestone-press.com

Dedication

Thank you, Cobblestone Press. For everything.

Chapter One

"Serena, why'd you call me? Aren't you supposed to be on vacation or something?" The tease in her friend's voice sounded more like annoyance. "Kate's doing just fine without you."

Serena couldn't ignore the tone any longer. She got the message loud and clear. She sighed into the phone. "Irene, I didn't call to check up on Kate. I'm just taking a break, that's all."

"Uh-huh, sure you are! There's no need to lie to me. I've known you for far too long. You're such a workaholic that you just *had* to check up on the person filling in for you. Well, just so you know, she can't wait to get back to her own job. By the way, why haven't you mentioned a certain dark-haired, blue-eyed guy yet?" Irene asked with a snicker.

Damn. Her friend and workmate knew her better than she liked to admit. A certain tall hunk was going to be the next thing on her agenda. *Damn it.* She'd just referred to a phone call as an agenda. It was true—without much effort, Serena could be a pathetic loser. If she was brutally honest with herself, she really didn't have much of a life outside the office. Now that she was away from it, she felt useless.

"Well, it's good to hear she's not getting comfy in my job, but I wasn't even thinking about *him*," she lied, even though she'd fantasized about his dark curls and dazzling smile for months now. Tom made her temperature rise, and her body responded. There'd been a lot of flirting between them, but Serena hadn't had the nerve to pursue him. She enjoyed the game too much. The anticipation worked her into a frenzy,

and it was about time it uncoiled. Maybe when she went back to work, she'd try to seduce him.

"I don't want to be the one to burst your bubble, but he's been having lunch with Evie every single day this week," Irene said with a sigh. "I think they've got a thing."

"But Evie's married."

"What can I tell you? She's a slut, and you've been leading him on without any action for too long." Irene lowered her voice, and the office background noise grew in intensity. "I've told you a thousand times, a guy like that needs more than just bread crumbs. Evie probably opened up the buffet on their first lunch date."

The imagery was too much for her to bear. The mere thought of Tom's hard, tall body being ravaged by a cheap bottle-blond made her blood boil. "Yeah, okay. I gotta get back to the unpacking. Thanks for the chat." *And for ruining every sexual fantasy I'll ever have again.*

"No problem. And hey, don't forget he was just a silly crush, okay? There are plenty of other hot guys out there willing to give you a piece of their—"

"Okay, gotta go. Bye." Serena pulled the cordless phone away from her ear and dumped it on the coffee table with a thump. A crush? She felt like such an idiot, but it was true. What twenty-eight year old woman had a crush on a co-worker? Well, *she* obviously did. It said a lot about her social life. Her best friend was someone she'd met at work about five years ago, and the man she lusted after was from the same office.

She really needed to get out more.

Serena Wilks looked around the large living room of her new apartment. Most of the furniture was now in place, although it still looked a little empty. The expanse of room was double the size of any of the places she'd rented over the years. She'd been saving as much of her money as she could for a long time, to get herself into a place like this. Situated in a good neighborhood, and a ten-minute walk from downtown, the warehouse building had been turned into apartments less than a decade ago. The people who owned it before her had renovated this studio so nicely, she hadn't hesitated to make an offer. The only other

available—and much cheaper—apartment a few floors down had felt strange, as if it were haunted, or something. Not that she believed in that sort of nonsense.

As her gaze settled on the many boxes still left to unpack, her spirits dampened further. She'd been unpacking and setting up her new place since Sunday afternoon, and she hadn't done much of anything else.

She rolled her shoulders and the back of her neck cramped. She massaged the tense area and decided that the only thing able to relax and revitalize the kinks in her body would be a yoga workout. A nice, hot bath would do the same, but right now, she hadn't unpacked much in the bathroom.

Serena sighed, pushed off the leather couch, and headed toward the DVD player. At least that and the TV and stereo were all connected. She grabbed the yoga disc from the case and placed it into the player's tray. This was her favorite workout, and she was already wearing shorts and a tank top, so all she needed to do was lay out her yoga mat, which remained rolled up against the coffee table. She grabbed the remote, skipped the introduction, and spread the mat on the floor a few feet away from the screen.

She crossed her legs in front of her with both hands pressed to her knees and started the appropriate breathing routine. Calm filled her body, and she forgot about all the dumb things that made her feel like a foolish adolescent living in a grown woman's body.

Serena took a deep breath into her lungs and released it slowly through her nose. Every muscle in her body felt worked out. It was what she loved the most about yoga—that she could feel sore, yet relaxed. She found it to be the most serene form of exercise she'd ever enjoyed, and she'd tried many. For years, she'd been an aerobics junkie, starting in her teens and then continuing through the many changes of her life.

Years ago, she'd popped into a yoga studio, but after the original owner had sold it and moved out, it just hadn't been the same. It became a place where younger women tried to show off perky bodies and constantly gossiped about the older ones. She hated gyms for the same reason.

In the end, she'd settled for DVDs instead of other classes. The effect and results were the same, and all in the comfort of her own home.

Serena slowly opened her eyes. She lay comfortably on the floor in relaxation pose. The hair on her arms stood up straight as the feeling of being watched washed over her, tightening her stomach muscles. A foreign presence shifted the air inside her living room. She was no longer alone, and it scared the crap out of her.

She prepared to push upward, to look around and make sure no one had climbed in through one of the windows, but she couldn't move. Besides, she lived in a tall building that didn't have window access from the outside.

As she tried to lift up on her elbows, she fought invisible fingers that held her arms down.

Relax, a voice said inside her head.

Her eyes widened as she calmed long enough to come face-to-face with a man hovering above her. The length of his body lay parallel to hers. His long, dark hair fell forward, the ends caressing her cheeks. Goosebumps ignited along her exposed skin. He was so close. His deep, brown gaze pinned hers as he opened his mouth to speak words she couldn't hear. She wasn't good at lip reading at the best of times, but considering the shock racing through her body because of this bizarre intrusion, Serena had no idea what he was trying to say.

She wanted to move, but more than anything, she wanted to sit up and run into the safety of her bedroom, away from whatever this man was. He still hovered above in perfect alignment to her supine body. He appeared to get closer, and the sensation of hands she'd felt earlier were no long holding her down.

As fear turned to wonder, she found herself gazing at him, seeing him now without panic to cloud her judgment.

"Who are you?" she whispered like some silly girl in a scary movie.

His lips were full when he mouthed something back...something she couldn't decipher.

"I don't believe in ghosts." Serena squeezed her eyes tight and reopened them.

The man was gone, but the warmth of his stare along her body remained.

She stayed on her back for a long time as she stared at the ceiling, sensing the invisible caress of the mysterious man—or ghost—playing along her body. The feathery touch moved down her thighs and legs, lingering as he receded.

She let out a shaky breath filled with pent up desire.

If all went well tonight, she hoped to go to sleep with the memory of his long hair and exposed muscled arms, so she could imagine what it would feel like to have him touch her naked body.

Her breath caught in her throat at the thought. She suddenly realized it had been ages since she'd connected with any man. If the sheer hallucination of a good-looking man could arouse her this much, instead of filling her with dread, it had definitely been too long.

As thoughts filled her mind, and one of her hands traveled along her stomach, Serena knew of only one way to relieve the heat.

For the first time in months, the man she fantasized about as her fingers reached lower was no longer Tom.

Chapter Two

When the afternoon sun peeked in through the window behind the couch, Serena released a breath. She looked at the patterns the blinds left on the hardwood floor, and a surge of pride raced through her body. This was actually *her* place.

She'd unpacked several more boxes and was in the process of breaking them down when the phone rang. A sigh of relief escaped her. She'd been looking for the phone for a few hours after her call with Irene. She was sure she'd dumped it on the coffee table, but when she went to call Irene to tell her about her insane incident it hadn't been there. Well, she wouldn't have told her about the reaction it roused in her, but she wanted to share the fact she was positive she'd encountered a stranger inside her apartment.

She walked out of the living room, trying to follow the ringing sound and eventually found the cordless in the bedroom on top of her bed seconds before the answering machine cut in.

"Hello?" she called into the phone, holding it against her right ear.

"Hey, Serena. I just wanted to let you know we're all headed for the pub tonight. If you're interested, we're going to the Imperial. *He's* going to be there, minus the slut. I heard her husband's got other plans for them tonight."

Irene sure can get a mouthful out without a breath in between. "Oh," was all she could think to say.

"Well, is that a yes?"

"It's an, I-don't-think-it's-a-good-idea." Serena lifted a hand to her mouth, chewing on her thumbnail.

"Come on, I know you're bored. Unpacking isn't exactly your cup of tea, so what have you got to lose? I reckon that if you stop cock-teasing, you could get yourself at least one night out of him. Come on, you know you want to." Irene sounded as if she was on a mission and wouldn't give up. "I want to be the one who tells that slut how you bagged Tom after a few drinks. Maybe then she'll get her paws off him."

"I don't want a one-night stand with Tom. How awkward would that be in the office?" She shook her head, thinking how great it would be to have actual sex with someone else in the room. She missed a man's touch so much.

"Since when's that bothered you?" Irene said with a snort.

Serena sighed. "Since now." A string of one-night stands flashed in her mind. It wasn't that she was easy to conquer, but proper judgment usually clouded her mission of finding Mister Right. It was just a shame that she'd let so many Mister Wrongs into her life in the process, and usually men who had something to do with her job. Not a wise move and she was sick of it. Besides, her interest in Tom seemed to be slowly fading. The phantom guy who'd appeared above her filled her with intrigue. She couldn't get him out of her mind. But the fact Tom was *maybe* doing Evie crept to the forefront. She was a cheap hussy with a reputation to match, and if he'd screwed her, Serena didn't want a piece of him.

"Okay, did something happen to you that I don't know about since we spoke this morning?"

"Like what?" Her heart raced at the memory of the ghost, followed by everything she'd imagined he would do and say to her while she pleased herself afterward.

"I don't know. You get abducted by aliens?" Irene joked.

"I didn't get abducted, but you know..." She hesitated. "I did see something."

"What?"

"I think this apartment is haunted."

A small chuckle followed. "What?"

"I know it sounds insane, but I saw this guy while I was doing yoga. He was almost on top of me—"

"Okay, if you don't want to come, that's fine. You don't have to give me some bullshit story about a ghost. How stupid do you think I am?" Her anger was evident in the sharp tone of her voice.

"I'm not kidding around, Irene. Besides, you're the one that brought up aliens."

"I was being sarcastic."

"Honestly, I think there's someone in here with me."

"Okay, you say hi to Casper for me, because I'm heading out for a night of drinking and, hopefully, some hanky-panky, which by the sounds of it, you need pretty desperately." Irene's facts-only personality shone through her tone.

Serena held the phone to her ear long after her friend had hung up. She couldn't believe she'd blurted out something so insane. Irene was all about facts and only believed in what she could see for herself. It was why she condemned religion. She claimed that until God dropped into the office for lunch, she wouldn't believe in his existence. That comment always made Serena laugh because until this crazy incident, she'd thought along the same lines.

She sighed, and her stomach rumbled in complaint.

The only food she had in the house was milk and cereal, and she'd been eating that for a couple of days. Now that she was halfway through her moving vacation, and not enjoying a single moment of her first week off, she decided to call for a pizza.

* * * * *

"Open up your awareness." His voice sounded husky as he ran one hand along her cheek and the other down the side of her neck. The feathery touches set her skin on fire.

"How do I do that?" Serena released a satisfied breath. On some level, she knew this was just a dream, but the orgasm she'd enjoyed felt as real as the one she'd self-induced in the living room earlier.

"Just relax and allow yourself to open up to me. Relaxation is the key to our connection. I've been waiting for someone to hear me," he whispered near her ear. "And now *you* can...."

Serena smiled at the way his hair tickled her face. "I don't think I can do it."

"Yoga..."

The echo of his voice remained inside her mind long after he'd completely vanished. Opening her eyes to her new bedroom, she lay on her bed, alone. As she so often did nowadays.

Her ragged breath and rapid heartbeat settled slowly, while her mind held on to every contour of the naked body she'd taken pleasure from during her nap. *What's going on with me?* Now, this mysterious man was invading her dreams as well? Irene was right about her need to engage in a real relationship. As satisfying as sex without commitment was, Serena couldn't shake the loneliness and hoped she'd soon be able to find the balance of both.

Fantastic sex and a wonderful relationship—that's what I need.

According to the alarm clock, she'd only napped for an hour. She pushed the sheets off her body, extended her legs over the side of the bed, and stood up for a long stretch and yawn. Her muscles felt a little tight, even after the attempt at yoga earlier in the morning, but she had been doing it a little less regularly since the upheaval of moving into her new apartment.

Maybe it would be a good idea to engage in another session. Her mind sure could use the relaxation. It was the only time of the day when she could be totally quiet without the many thoughts about her career, relationships—or lack of—and financial stability continually hounding her brain. For now, she was happy with her position as supervisor within the office of a well-known retail company. It paid well, and the hours weren't excessively long, though overtime had never been an issue for her. There really wasn't much more to her life, which was why she felt in desperate need of some changes.

As she sat on the yoga mat she'd left after her last attempt, wearing nothing but her underwear and tank top, she switched on the TV and

DVD player. Serena felt her body relax with every deep breath she took as the instructor announced each new position.

This time, when she cleared her mind completely and opened up her awareness, the mysterious stranger appeared in front of her. The instant heat of arousal raced through her body.

Chapter Three

"Who are you?" she whispered. The yoga instructions on the screen became nothing more than background images and noise.

His mouth opened, but still no sound.

Serena released a deep breath to force herself to reach that place of total relaxation inside her mind, a place where nothing could interfere. She closed her eyes, and after several deep breaths, she eventually heard his voice.

"...is Noah."

She opened her eyes, trying hard not to lose concentration. "Noah," she repeated. The sound of his simple name rolled off her tongue, making her feel all tingly. "Who are you, and why are you here?"

"Please, I need you to listen to me."

"Not until I get some answers. What are you doing inside my apartment?"

The way his body sat in the same position as hers—legs crossed with hands on knees, but floating off the floor—was a little creepy. He looked around, and when he turned back toward her, his dark eyebrows knotted on his brow. She shook off the unease, concentrating on his face and arms, the way his chest rose and fell even though he looked a little shimmery around the edges. Not quite real... *Was* he a ghost?

When his surprised eyes met hers, he asked, "I'm inside an apartment?"

"Yes." His image flickered a little, and his soothing voice made her

shiver.

"No, don't go yet. I need to know why you're haunting my apartment."

"I'm not haunting it," Noah answered. "I'm stranded, in limbo."

"But why?"

"I can give you those answers another time, when I've built up more strength and can sustain myself."

"What does that mean?" she whispered, watching him uncross his legs and kneel in front of her.

"No one has been able to see me, much less connect with me since I've been in this state. I think there's only one way to rebuild my strength and work out how to stay in the here and now, and not where I currently am."

Noah was so close she thought she felt his cool breath on her face. But that wasn't possible, was it?

"Are you...dead?" The sound of the word left a bad taste inside her mouth, but she wanted to understand just an inkling of what was going on. Serena had never encountered incidents in life that couldn't be explained by logic.

Noah shook his head as his hand reached for the strands of hair that had fallen out of her ponytail. "No, just lost. I need you to find me. Help me get back."

"I don't know how to do that." She breathed so deep, her lungs protested in pain. The desire to have this phantom man, or whatever he was, touch her made her physically ache so much that her insides quivered. She was going to burst if he didn't touch her soon.

"I can read the desire in your aura," he said. His eyes were so close to hers, and his fingertips now traced her jaw the same way he'd done in the dream she'd only just awoken from. "You're attracted to me, and I believe it's what I've been missing all along. An attraction so strong it begs to be consummated."

"Consummated?" She closed her eyes when the softness of his full lips found hers. The series of small, delicate kisses felt more like flutters along her skin. Even though they were so close to each other, and in the

process of intimately touching, something seemed to be wedged between them...something highlighting the incident with a glow of fantasy.

Am I still asleep?

"Open your eyes. I want you to see me."

"There's no one else here," she said, breathless, refusing to look at him because he just couldn't be real. None of this made any sense.

"Are you sure about that?" One of his hands pressed just above her left breast. "I'm really here."

She trembled, her body betraying her, and she arched forward to force his palm on her covered breast. "Yes."

Noah spread his hand over her top, and she bit down on her bottom lip. As he lightly pinched, her nipple contracted beneath his touch.

She moaned, and her eyes jerked open.

Noah's gaze darkened. One second he was dressed in a battered pair of jeans and sleeveless T-shirt, and the next he was completely naked.

She resisted the urge to look at his body, even if her fingers itched to take him into her hand, and into herself. She suddenly had the need to feel truly alive. Even if she didn't know this man, or if he wasn't entirely real, she felt a need to connect with him, both physically and emotionally. It wouldn't be the first time she'd had sex with a complete stranger, but it would probably be the safest. A ghostly man couldn't make her pregnant, or infect her with a sexually transmitted disease, could he? No, this situation sounded safer by the second. And Noah was just so gorgeous, especially now that his pouty lips were caressing the side of her neck.

"Does my touch feel real?" he whispered.

She nodded and pushed her head back so he could nibble below her chin.

"And this?" His hand moved to her thigh.

She could feel the softness of his touch. "You're so gentle."

"You don't like gentle?"

She nodded again. Though she'd never had such a light touch before, Serena decided that gentle was an avenue she wanted to travel.

Noah offered her a dazzling smile, and the shimmer around his body sharpened. Her phantom lover seemed to shine brighter in the

shadowed light coming through the living room window.

"I like whatever you've got to give," she whispered, and meant it. *So much for looking for a real relationship.* She was about to have sex with some sort of spirit, if any of this was even real, of course.

Noah moved his hands away from her body. Concentration fixed on his handsome features as he reached for the bottom of her tank top. His fingertips grabbed a hold of it but they slipped through the fabric. He tried again, and the same thing happened. "Damn it!" he cursed.

The way his face darkened with disappointment touched her heart so much she pulled both her tank top and panties off within seconds. "It's okay. I'm naked now."

Serena pressed her back against the yoga mat and waited for him to float above her. When he did, she smiled at him. His fingers found their way to the nest of curls between her legs. The soft touch warmed her instantly, and she spread her legs.

He looked down at her. It had been a while, so she knew it wouldn't take much to make her come, especially when she fixed her stare on his erection. The way his cock stood up in front of him made her spread her legs even wider in open invitation.

Noah shook his head. "I don't think I'll be able to connect with you in *that* way just yet."

Her disappointment was hard to hide.

"But I think I can manage this." Noah's fingertips traced along the edge of her pussy. "I know you like it. I've seen you do this before."

Her face heated.

"Don't be embarrassed." He dipped a single finger inside and rubbed at the folds inside her wet lips. He pursued further until his illuminated finger was lost deep inside her in a light caress.

She reached for his cock, but her hand went right through it.

"Is this what you're trying to do?" He wrapped his other hand around the thick erection in front of him.

She nodded.

He rubbed his palm up and down the length, his eyes closing for a second as he continued to push his fingers deeper inside her. "You feel so

good..."

"So do you," she said, even though her hand went right through his shoulder. Confusion swamped her. How could she feel his kisses, light and sweet, or even the way his fingers toyed inside her until they settled into a nice rhythm on her clitoris, but she couldn't touch him? Was he cursed or something? She'd have to find out more about him, but at the moment, she was transfixed as one of his hands explored inside her and the other moved up and down his own erection.

Serena's body relaxed for a moment, and instantly clenched up as an orgasm tore along her body. She screamed out in pleasure. Her toes curled when she met his eyes. When he spilled himself all over her stomach, it didn't reach her skin. It fell into the air, vanishing into small crystals of light.

"Oh, Serena." Noah moaned as he slipped his fingers out of her dampness.

"Noah..." Her heart beat so fast, breath failed her. "Noah?"

Her phantom lover had come and gone.

Chapter Four

The knock on the door came seconds after she'd stepped out of the shower and slipped on some clean clothes. Being summer, shorts and tank tops were ideal for the work she still had to do around the apartment. It also provided easy access for her phantom lover and their sexual activity.

She grinned. Although, she wasn't sure if the dream really counted. It had probably been her subconscious pushing her over the edge because she was so prone to fantasies nowadays.

Another knock sounded as she towel-dried her hair and made her way toward the front door. She felt so relaxed, as if sexual connection was the one thing she'd missed all this time. No amount of yoga could get her this relaxed. Not even the personal-inflicted orgasms made her feel this way.

"Serena!" a familiar voice called from the other side of the front door.

She dumped the towel on one of the stools in front of the kitchen counter. "Irene?" *What's she doing here?* Hadn't she said she was going out with their workmates tonight? She switched on the kitchen light, illuminating the living room, and checked the kitchen wall clock. It was almost midnight.

"Se-re-na!" came a second voice. This one was male.

Her heart sped up at the thought of who it was. She quickened her steps, her bare feet slapping against the floorboards until she reached the front door and opened it.

"Serena, sorry about this," Irene said with an apologetic smile, "but he really wanted to see you."

Her gaze swept over Tom. His curly, dark hair was tousled, and the tie he'd probably worn during the day was now tucked into the chest pocket of his business shirt, which hung out of his waistband.

"What the hell happened to him?"

Irene shrugged, trying to keep her hold around him as it threatened to slip. "He had a few too many drinks."

"Hello, Se-e-eren-a-a-a...that's such a beautiful name," he slurred.

"Hi, Tom." She turned to her friend and whispered, "He's drunk, isn't he?"

"Well, he did trip up the stairs and smacked his head in the process. So, I'm guessing yes."

"I don't understand what you're doing here, Irene." Serena opened the door a little wider, but she couldn't bring herself to invite them in.

"Thought you might want some company." She avoided looking at her. Irene was still dressed in her usual work attire—a long skirt and matching jacket. Unlike Tom, she looked as fresh as she probably had this morning.

"At this time of night?"

"Look, can we come in? He's getting a little heavy to hold out here." Irene grunted as Tom threw an arm over her shoulder.

"Sure, sure." Serena helped her half-drag the drunken man she'd fantasized about so many times, into the apartment.

He snuggled his face up against her shoulder and mumbled, "Mmmm, you smell good, Serena."

"Okay...thanks." Once they stood near the couch, she and Irene let go at the same time, and he collapsed onto it. His back slid off the silky material, and he closed his eyes.

"Serena, I've wanted you for so long..."

She looked up and met Irene's eyes. Her friend didn't look disheveled or concerned, even after she'd dragged him into her apartment. She looked the same as she always did—cool, calm, and collected. Her tight ponytail didn't have a single strand out of place.

"Okay, what's going on?" she asked, putting her hands on hips.

"I'm sorry, Serena, but he had a few drinks, sat down next to me, and started asking questions about you." Irene frowned. "After several more drinks, he started calling me Serena and told me how much he wanted to be with me. He even tried to stick his hand up my skirt!"

"Hold on, I thought you said he was with Evie now."

She shrugged. "That's what I thought too, but he claims she's tried to give him a blow job several times during lunch, and he's refused every time."

"Do you believe him?"

"Sure, why would a guy lie about that? Besides, he's drunk. People usually can't lie during a drunken stupor."

"So, why did you bring him here?" Serena spared him another glance. He really was nice looking, bordering on model looks, but she couldn't get Noah out of her mind.

"I thought you might want to...you know?"

"Take advantage of him?" Her eyes rounded in shock.

"No, no, that's not what you'd be doing at all. He tried to stick his hand up my skirt thinking it was you! Come on, Serena. This guy wants you, and I know you've been daydreaming about him for ages. So, why not use this wonderful opportunity to finally admit to each other that there's a spark between you? And if it's nothing more than a one-night stand, at least you can tell me all about it tomorrow." Irene lifted an eyebrow. She looked proud of herself, and probably thought this was the perfect plan, for Serena to bed a guy she'd drooled over for months.

He sat slumped on the couch, hugging one of her cushions as he whispered her name.

"I appreciate that you thought this would somehow help my sex life—"

"Lack of."

"Whatever!"

"Just be glad he's here, and do whatever you want with him. I'm sure he won't mind." Irene took a step toward the still open front door.

"Wait! Can't you see he's completely drunk? Even if I wanted to,

we can't do anything while he's like this."

"Then get him a cab," she called over her shoulder with a shrug.

"I don't know where he lives."

"Neither do I. But listen, why don't you let him sleep it off? When he wakes up tomorrow morning, you can strut your stuff around and bam, he won't know what hit him." Irene paused under the doorway and gave her a small wave. "I've got to get home to feed my cat."

With those words, she tip-tapped her high heels out of Serena's apartment, leaving her with a drooling, drunken man on her couch.

"But you don't have a cat," she whispered.

Chapter Five

"Serena."

She slapped the hand away from her back, not wanting to wake up from another raunchy dream. Noah's face had just disappeared between her thighs, and she anticipated the first lick of his tongue.

"Serena, you need to wake up now."

"No, I want to sleep," she murmured into the pillow, trying her best to keep both eyes shut and her mind focused on the dream she wasn't ready to leave. "Go away!"

"I can do more for you than that dream."

The words made her gut clench with desire. She recognized the voice. She rolled over in bed, hoping to find Noah, but instead, she looked up at the disheveled workmate she'd left sleeping on the couch. After Irene left, and she'd locked the front door, Serena had sat across from Tom for a while, watching him sleep, the rise and fall of his chest a constant as he whispered her name when he turned from one side to the other.

She hadn't realized he'd felt the same way about her. Sure, they enjoyed a lot of mutual flirting and innuendo, but with looks like his, she figured he enjoyed toying with all sorts of girls. Now, without having to discuss it, she knew he felt a pang of something for her. What, she wasn't entirely sure, but there was something there.

But how did she feel about him now? She was totally smitten with a phantom man. She could still feel his soft touch along her exposed skin. He wasn't real though...and could possibly be a manifestation of her

loneliness.

The thought made her feel like a total idiot, and was just another thing to add to the list. First, she'd been stuck in a juvenile crush without doing anything about it, and now that she had the man inside her apartment, she wanted another one. *What the hell is wrong with me?*

"Tom?" she finally whispered as she rubbed her eyes with the back of her hands.

He shook his head. "Only in the physical sense."

"But..."

He held a finger to his lips.

She watched in amazement as Tom stood stone still. Noah's misty body stepped sideways before hurling back into Tom as if to show her what he'd done.

"What's going on?"

"Who is this man? Is he your boyfriend?"

Serena shook her head. "No, I don't have a boyfriend."

"Then who is he?"

"He's a workmate that had too much to drink and...needed a place to stay." *Is that jealousy in his voice?* Her eyes never left his. It felt strange to look at Tom but know it was the other man in her life doing the talking. A shiver raced down her spine at the sheer creepiness of this situation. Yet, arousal lay only a step behind her jumbled thoughts.

Tom's long fingers pulled out the rest of the shirt from the top of his black trousers. He undid the buttons one at a time until it hung on either side of his perfectly muscled chest.

Her breath caught. Tom was as lean as she'd imagined. In her thoughts, she'd touched those rock-hard abs a thousand times and knew exactly where the dark trail of hair below his bellybutton led.

"He's got a good body, doesn't he?"

Noah's voice surprised her, shaking her out of the reverie. She nodded.

"I can feel a pull inside him, an attraction towards you," he added. "Are you sure you're not...lovers?"

"No, we're workmates. Maybe you sense our flirting?"

"It's more than that. He's drawn to you on a very deep level, but that's not a problem. It will only serve as a stronger bond between us and help complete what we're about to do."

"And what's that? Tell me what's going on here. How can you be inside his body like this? I'm so confused. I need some answers." Serena lay back against the pillows and turned her face away for a moment, noticing the first light of daybreak filtering in through the blinds to the right of her bed.

He suddenly stood right in front of her. Noah closed his eyes for a second as he pushed the white business shirt away from Tom's chest. It slipped off his back in slow motion.

"What's wrong?"

"There's nothing wrong." Tom's face looked down at her, but inside his eyes, the blue irises were now Noah's dark eyes. She'd only known this phantom for a short while but already felt as if he'd somehow gotten under her skin and into her soul. Serena recalled him saying he couldn't connect with her until he had more power. Even if the comment didn't make as much sense as she would've liked it to, she suspected that using another man's body would enable them to be together. She longed to be with him, and realized that if he needed Tom as a vehicle to make love to her, she could do this.

"It's been so long since I've felt anything along my skin," he finally answered her question. "I know this must seem very confusing to you, Serena, but I promise I'll explain it all very soon. Right now, just seeing you on that bed naked and dreaming about me is enough to push me over the edge. I need to feel your skin against mine. I want to be inside you, and taste you."

"But...what about Tom? How will this affect him?" A twinge of guilt spiked beneath her skin. Could she do this? Take advantage of him this way? She bit down on her bottom lip. It had been the reason why Irene dropped him off in the first place, right? Still, she didn't feel right about this.

Noah's eyes blazed. "This man wants you as much as *I* want you. I believe this is why he came to you, so we're not doing anything he

wouldn't be willing to do himself."

All the confusion, and lack of explanation in the world, couldn't keep her away from him. Her skin felt tight, as if a release would be the only thing able to unhinge her. She swallowed the lump in her throat. Lust made her body ache all over. She needed him in a way she'd never needed anyone before. This was beyond cravings of the flesh.

Serena pushed the sheet away from her body and sat on the side of the bed. With legs spread out on either side of him, her face was eye level with his groin.

With shaky fingers that knew exactly what they wanted, Serena unbuckled his belt and had the button out of the loop and the zipper down in record time. She yanked his pants down his hips. He stood rigid, and moaned.

She'd enjoyed the touch of sex in many ways and forms during her life, but never with this element of awe and mystery. It excited her to be dealing with something that didn't seem possible in the real world. Yet, here she was about to fulfill the ultimate female fantasy of being with the man who excited more than just her body, and acting out the many daydreams she'd secretly enjoyed while at work with the other.

Tom's hard body didn't disappoint, and neither did the erection his boxer shorts hardly kept contained. She flicked her fingers over it, and Noah shook.

A smile spread along her lips as she pulled off the only other garment between them. She'd slept naked that night, hoping that her phantom lover would break whatever rules kept him from being solid and come to take her in this very bed. She couldn't believe it was actually happening, even in such an unexpected way.

Her fingers wrapped around his erection, sliding up and down from the head to the bottom near his thighs and back again. It felt so silky beneath her fingers, and she yearned to taste it so badly, her head moved lower on its own accord.

Tom's cock filled her mouth. For just a second, she thought it a little obscene to be sucking another man's cock in the pretense that it was Noah's.

Serena pulled her head back, and he slipped out from between her lips. She looked up into those eerie brown eyes and noticed the shimmer around Tom's body. It hadn't been there before.

"It's fine, Serena," he said with a small smile. "This isn't how I would've liked our first connection to be either. It's very convenient that he's got such a great body, though. Just ignore the exterior if it bothers you. I'm right here on the inside."

She nodded and wrapped her mouth around his erection again, this time sucking it in to get a proper taste. Serena moved closer.

Noah grabbed a handful of her long hair and jerked her head up slightly. He groaned as she continued the rhythm, knowing this angle provided the best sensation for him.

"Oh, Serena..."

She heard the whisper, and goose bumps spread along her skin. That had sounded much more like Tom than Noah, and it made her feel uneasy. Just how much of this would her workmate remember?

The hand at the back of her head gently pulled her hair back. She allowed his cock to slip out again. It glistened with her saliva, even bigger than before.

"Lie back for me, my Serena." This time, she heard Noah's voice.

She didn't argue when he lowered Tom's body to his knees.

"To taste you is going to be a pleasure," he whispered along her pubic hair.

His breath so close to her throbbing pussy made her shiver. Noah offered her one last smile before he lowered Tom's mouth between her legs to continue what he'd interrupted in her dream.

She whimpered in pleasure as she ran her fingertips along the curved edge of her breasts until her nipples contracted. She squeezed each of them.

The sensations between her legs paused, and she lifted her head to see why. Noah's dark eyes narrowed as he watched her fingers with an expression of envy.

"You want to taste them too?" she asked.

He nodded and crawled toward her like a lithe cat. He lowered his

face with a smile, taking one of her nipples into his mouth while she touched the other. The combination was agonizingly erotic, and she bit down on her bottom lip to keep from crying out.

He shifted to the other nipple, this time rubbing the moist one he'd left behind with his own fingers. She arched her back in response, and the moisture between her legs slipped down the inside of her thigh, turning her on further.

Noah grunted and abandoned her chest. He fell to his knees again, his mouth diving between her legs as he licked her clitoris.

She grabbed a hold of the sheets on either side, closing her eyes to the vivid sensations he stirred along her pussy. His tongue swirled around her clitoris while one finger, and then two, plunged inside her. It wasn't long before climax surged through her system and flooded it.

She cried out, her body singing a pleasurable tune as her toes curled. Noah pulled away from between her legs, licking his lips as he rose onto the bed.

She could hardly breathe with the erotic buzz traveling beneath her skin.

"Serena," he whispered near her ear. "Open up for me."

She nodded and watched as he positioned himself between her thighs and leaned forward. When his cock pushed inside her, her first thought was protection. Making love to a phantom lover was one thing, but to use a real man behind the act might affect her.

"Wait." She put a hand on his firm chest and met Noah's ethereal eyes in Tom's face.

"What's wrong? You've changed your mind?"

"No, it's just... I don't want any accidents."

A small smile spread along the luscious full lips. "Don't worry. While I'm in control of his body, you're safe in every way possible."

The softness burning inside his eyes made her breath catch, and she had to release it slowly. Was that real emotion she'd spied inside the darkness of those irises?

With a tender touch, he caressed her face with the back of his hand. If she concentrated on his eyes and the way he touched her, she could

forget that the body pressed against hers wasn't really his. All of a sudden, she wanted to know everything about him. She needed to know who he was and why he'd been trapped inside her new apartment. How did someone get into such a bizarre situation without being a ghost? Everything about this challenged what she'd always believed in.

When he entered her with a firm thrust of his narrow hips, every thought slipped from her mind. Noah leaned over to kiss her. Her eyes involuntarily closed as her fingers traced his waist.

She moaned, and he echoed the same.

Above her, he set into a faster rhythm that accommodated both of them. She wrapped her arms around his waist and locked her feet together at the base of his spine. He licked his lips in response, and she knew this was as perfect as it would ever get with anyone. After this man, she would be spoiled for everyone else.

When she looked up, Tom's façade had faded in comparison to Noah's.

Serena reached for his longish hair, and her fingertips flicked the ends. So silky and warm, it left a shimmer on her fingertips. She pulled her hand back in wonder, but nothing could hold her attention with his cock still lodged inside her.

"Oh, Noah..." The whisper slipped between her lips as another orgasm tore from her center and spread fast beneath her skin. Oxygen failed her, but Noah's mouth was there to catch her. His tongue met hers, and she shivered. Goose bumps raced along her body. Not because she was cold, but because of the way he made her feel both inside and out.

"Serena," he whispered back. His warm breath felt like a gentle breeze blowing across her skin. His pelvis thrust forward one last time before his shout tore through the silence of a new day as he came inside her. Noah pulled back and slid out from between her legs.

A light suddenly filled the bedroom, so bright she shielded her eyes with a hand. When it dimmed a little, she watched as Noah's spirit rose out of the body he'd just occupied.

Tom fell onto her, unconscious. She pushed him off using every bit of strength left inside her. She felt drained, but managed to squirm out

from beneath him.

"Noah." She pulled a hand out in front of her, trying to get his attention. She wanted to feel his touch again, without the need for the medium of another man's body. Just him. He was the one she could spend the rest of her life with. She had so many questions she wanted to ask him.

Dark eyes looked down at her as his body ascended. The top of his head almost hit the ceiling, and the luster surrounding him grew brighter than before. He looked like some sort of angel, minus the wings, his legs crossed as if he were preparing to do yoga or meditate. He didn't say a word, just looked at her with wide eyes and a small smile.

"Noah, what's happening?" She moved to the edge of the bed, tears threatening to break out at any moment. *No, please don't let this be a one-time thing*, she cried to herself. *I've had enough of those to last me a lifetime. I want more. I want...* "Noah."

His body continued to hover, swaying a little lower, like a leaf slowly falling from a tree in autumn. It took seconds for him to float in front of her, just above the mattress. Noah's hand tried to entwine around hers, but the misty flesh went right through. Her eyes blurred with the tears she didn't want him to see, and didn't want to shed. Why was he having such an extreme effect on her? She'd been able to engage in uncommitted sex and move on without a problem so many times before. Yet, this time, she didn't want to let go.

"Serena, we don't have long. Let me explain as much as I can before—"

"Before what?" Her heart plummeted into her stomach.

"Before I'm forced to go completely."

Chapter Six

"I don't want you to go." Her voice, raspy with pain, made her throat hurt. She turned her face away. Raw emotion pushed through, making her self-conscious. Was it a good idea to let a man know how much she wanted him so early on? Hell, wait a minute. He was the one who'd initiated this improbable situation.

Serena had heard of love at first sight. The type of attraction that grips your heart and soul upon a first glance, but she'd never believed in it. She'd always thought it was as much fiction as...ghosts.

Fingers fluttered against her chin before she had a chance to respond or move away. Noah's eyes were the only things not shimmering with this new glow of light around his phantom body.

"I know, Serena. I don't want to go either, but I started this a while ago," he answered, his tone full of regret. His fingers fell away from her face.

"What are you? You told me you weren't a ghost, yet you used someone else's body to make love to me." She looked down at Tom, the workmate she would've given anything to be with just last week. Now, as he lay on his front in naked perfection, wrapped tight in drunken slumber, she didn't feel a thing stirring inside her. Every bit of lust and want she'd felt when they'd shared each other's body had been for Noah, not him.

She met Noah's dark gaze again, and he sighed, but there was no breath to follow the action. He was back to being some uncanny spirit she

didn't understand.

"I'm a mystic."

She frowned, unfamiliar with the term. Then again, she'd never been fluent with anything involving hocus-pocus. Until now, she hadn't seen a thing to support it otherwise. Serena shook her head. "I don't know what that is."

"This life...this world let me down from day one. I was sick and tired of the reality and circumstance I had no control over. I was sick to death of life and found a path to Enlightenment."

"Is this some sort of religious thing?"

"It can certainly be seen that way, but I learned so much more, and did all this on my own. I had no teacher or mentor, or even a group. It was just me and the books I purchased. It took years to study and learn the proper way to shed my shell and reach my higher self. I had to discard every layer of my life and the physical shell that constricted me to the mundane existence I couldn't tolerate any longer." His eyes had a faraway look about them, unfocused, as if the memory overwhelmed him even now. "Back then, I didn't have anyone special in my life, nothing to fuel my passion."

Still as confused as she'd been the first time she'd seen him the day before, Serena couldn't believe how fast everything moved around them. "I still don't understand what that has to do with the way you are now, here with me, in some sort of spirit form."

"I followed the path and found my inner light last week. Just as I left my physical body to rise to the higher plane that I knew would await me after all of this was over, something stopped me. I couldn't get past this apartment."

His face was so reflective. He really did look like some sort of phantom. The thought made her both scared and excited.

"Though at the time I didn't know where I was. There was just darkness."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "When it happened, I didn't understand it either. Then you walked into the darkness and a different light lit up inside me."

Suddenly, I understood what was going on, what my real higher purpose had led me to see and understand."

The smile on his face was contagious, even if she wasn't sure what he was getting at. The fire of desire deep inside her stomach made her entire body heat up. Her gut clenched with arousal that buzzed between her legs. Her body reacted to his words and proximity.

"You," Noah said in his husky voice. "I shed everything superficial in my life so I could allow my mystic spirit to rise out of my body to roam free and reach the one place where I truly belonged. And that led me to *you*."

She sucked in a shaky breath. She'd always wanted to hear these words from a man. Maybe not in the same context, but to realize that someone felt she was special made her excitement peak, even if the words came from a man beyond her reach.

After he'd explained a little of what he was and tried to achieve, she had a mental image of something she'd seen on TV about a man somewhere in India, who claimed to be seeking the ultimate Union. She'd snorted and laughed at the time. Now, here was proof of what total devotion to overcome the physical shell could achieve.

Her mind raced so fast that a throb started at her temples. What did this all mean in regards to his soul? How could he rise out of his own body and become trapped like this? And if he'd ascended from his body, where was it now? Would he be disconnected from it forever? It hurt too much to think about it.

As her gaze turned to his ethereal body, all Serena wanted to do was lie down and have him encircle her in his arms...but unless he used the other man asleep on her bed, his hands would just pass through her body. Only one piece of this puzzle stuck out. It made sense to her, because it sounded so similar to what he'd been talking about.

"Yoga..." The word had never meant so much to her. Her only real form of relaxation had been the one thing able to allow her to see the man she'd been seeking. But how could she be the answer to someone's enlightenment?

She was a slave to routine and all the things that made humans

appear almost mechanical. Serena arrived everywhere on time, slaved away at her job, and paid her bills before they were due. She followed the pattern of a woman trying to establish a career. And although on the surface it made her happy and proud of whom she aspired to be, she'd always longed for more.

He nodded. "Yes, yoga is what allowed your awareness to open up to me. It was our conduit."

"Noah, where are you now? I mean, where is your body?"

He looked around as if he were trying to see past whatever darkness engulfed him. She couldn't forget the first time he'd appeared, and his confusion at being inside her living room. "It's where I left it."

"But wouldn't someone miss you? Wouldn't they have alerted the police and have you removed, thinking you were dead?" The fact she could actually string this sentence together made her queasy. The thought of someone being trapped like this without a body or movement into whatever followed sounded extremely scary. She supposed when Noah made this rash decision, he wouldn't have considered all the consequences. Sometimes irrational ideas could get people into strange, uncomfortable situations. She'd done it before, and now seemed no different.

Why was she even trying to understand any of this? She'd just had sex with a man without a corporal body and, in turn, slept with a workmate. How would she explain any of this to Tom when he woke up? A headache added to the throbbing at her temples.

Noah shook his head. "No one will notice. I'm pretty much alone in the world. Besides, I'm not technically dead, so no one would be alerted by any strange smells. I also quit my job last month, so no workmates or bosses will hassle me either. It was essential for me to strip away everything. Does any of this make sense to you?"

He placed his hands on his knees and looked so unreal, she couldn't quell the urge to touch him, but her fingers passed right through his hand. "I guess this was your bizarre way of soul searching." Serena had often wondered whether she needed to take a step back and analyze what was, and what wasn't, important in life. She'd just never gotten

around to it.

Until now.

"I guess so. Many mystics aspire to be one with God, but I've never been a religious person, and I just wanted to reach enlightenment to the next level. I know there are other places for our soul and spirit to move on to when the person is ready, but it looks like I wasn't ready." He reached for her hand, but it was only an illusion when he seemed to touch it. "I'm ready for you, though, Serena. I don't understand exactly what's happened here or even why, but I still have enough connection to my inner self to know that I want to be with you."

His fingers moved to her cheek, and the feathery touch warmed her skin with his shimmering essence. She rubbed her face against his palm and closed her eyes to nothing more than a phantom caress. Serena thought she felt his touch solidify a little more than it had been seconds before, but it was probably just wishful thinking on her part.

"I want to be with you too." She opened her eyes.

Noah offered her a smile as his body rose a little higher.

"No!" She stood from the bed and reached up in vain. She wanted to grab a hold of him, force him back down, but her fingertips skimmed his leg and slipped through. He'd almost reached the ceiling again, and her heart ached at the possibility of his total disappearance from her life.

Serena, he called.

She heard his voice inside her head as she watched him rise further.

Noah offered her one last lopsided smile when she realized Tom was starting to wake up. What was she going to do now?

"Don't go," she whispered.

"Don't worry. I won't," Tom said.

Her heart sank. She collapsed onto the bed, her mind teeming with confusion.

She shifted away from the man who'd disappeared into the ceiling of her bedroom, and turned to the one who lay naked on her bed.

Chapter Seven

Tom's fingers on the back of her shoulders made her uncomfortable. It was still a shock, and very hard to understand how she could've had sex with his body yet envisioned and known that she'd been connected to a completely different man. It sounded obscene just thinking about it and for a second, she had to pinch her arm to make sure she was still awake.

Yes, I am.

"Come back to bed," Tom said from behind her, his fingertips trailing down her bare back.

She shook his hand away, feeling numb inside. Not a single bit of desire was left within her. She looked over her shoulder to find Tom lying on his back, happily displaying his erection for her. A smirk was plastered across his full lips. He was beautiful to look at, but he wasn't Noah.

"Serena. Come on, baby, I want to be with you." He raised his eyebrows and pointed his chin toward his cock. "I'm ready to go again."

"Again?" she echoed. She placed her hands in her lap, not knowing what else to do with them.

"Sure." He looked confused. "We spent the night together, didn't we? I mean, I woke up naked in your bed. This is *your* bed, right?"

She nodded, stood up, and headed toward the armchair she'd positioned in one corner of the room. She grabbed a light robe slung over the armrest, and wrapped it around her body. The almost see-through fabric reached mid-thigh, but it was better than staying naked. She

couldn't take his scrutiny any longer. She yanked the cord tight around her waist.

Tom lowered his gaze to her cleavage. "What're you doing?"

"Yes, this is my bed." She crossed her arms over her stomach and gazed at the blinds. She could tell by the vertical light seeping between the slats that the sun was already high in the sky.

"Then come back and give me some more—"

"How much of last night do you remember?" The way his hand patted the mattress beside him made her uneasy. She wasn't sure how to get out of this sticky situation. Would it be best to let him think they'd enjoyed one passionate encounter so he'd leave her alone? Or would it be better to make up some lame excuse to explain why he was naked in her bed?

He shrugged, and the muscles of his triceps bulged. He'd propped both arms behind his head, leering as if he was ready to ravage her. "I remember drinking in the pub, and looking for you..."

"And then?"

"I don't know for sure, but I remember how good it felt to touch you..."

Her heart beat faster. He probably couldn't remember the precise details after Irene had dropped him off, but he obviously recalled a little of the incident. Maybe he didn't need to know they'd been intimate. After all, she certainly couldn't tell him the truth.

"Yes, you blacked out," she said, an idea taking shape inside her brain. She noticed the discarded articles of his clothing on the floor where Noah had dumped them. At the thought of his long hair and dark eyes, her heart throbbed.

How could he be gone? Would he become the memory of a stranger who'd touched her heart and reached a higher depth of closeness than anyone else before him? Or would he return? She looked up at the ceiling. She doubted he'd come back, even though she wanted him to more than anything. Well, aside from getting this naked guy out of her bedroom.

"I did what?"

"You blacked out because you drank so much."

"So, come over and soothe me some more." Tom winked.

Taking the necessary steps to reach the clothes, she leaned over to grab his pants and boxers, and stuffed the business shirt underneath her bed. A pinch on her right butt cheek made her straighten in a hurry. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Babe, we had sex last night. I just want some more of your sweet ass. I've wanted you for a while now, but I couldn't tell if you were hot or cold." He reached for her arm.

She stumbled with his clothes in her hands and landed on his lap. His erection pressed beneath her as she tried to squirm away, but he held her tight. He reached upward and kissed her. His soft lips pressed against hers so lightly that for a second she kissed him back because it reminded her too much of Noah.

When he swept his tongue inside her mouth, and she tasted the tang of alcohol, she pulled away and jerked out of his hold.

"Okay, you're going hot and cold on me again."

"Tom, we didn't sleep together," she said as she held out his pants and boxers. "Take these and get dressed. I think you'll be all right to go home now, if I call you a cab."

"Wait a minute. You want me to go? Did you just use me for sex?" His face lined with bewilderment.

Serena's cheeks flamed with heat, and she hoped she wasn't blushing too much. He was closer to the truth than he could ever imagine. She *had* used him for sex, or at least used his body for the act of sex. Just not how he implied. "Tom, we didn't have sex!" she blurted.

"But we're both naked."

"I know how it looks, but we didn't do anything... We almost did. Before you stumbled into bed and passed out on me."

He looked at her with narrowed eyes. "That's when I blacked out? You're telling me that I passed up the opportunity to have sex with you last night?"

She slowly nodded. "I'm afraid so, but I couldn't move you. We were both already naked, so I just slid into bed beside you and fell

asleep.”

“But you told me not to leave.”

“I was having a strange dream.” *A very strange dream.* Maybe if she tried hard enough to convince herself Noah had been just that, then the hurt would go away. And maybe she could try to leave the possibility open with Tom...just in case she needed someone to take the edge off her bewildered heart and mind.

“Oh.” He sighed so heavily, his tight abdomen contracted. He took the pants and boxers from her. “Where’s my shirt?”

“You threw up on it. But if you leave it with me, I can clean it for you and get it back to you at work.” Her voice held an edge of doubt.

“Oh,” he said again. “And there’s no chance of you and I getting it on?”

She pointed at the alarm clock. “You’ve got work in a few hours.”

He followed her gaze. “Oh, shit, you’re right! Why the hell did I drink so much in the first place?”

“I don’t know, but if you need to use the shower you can.”

He shook his head. “No, I’ll go home and do it. I need to get some clean clothes anyway.”

She nodded.

He stood up and slipped on his boxer shorts, looking like some sort of male underwear model—a perfect body with flawless skin tone, and a face to match. Though now his brow furrowed with obvious confusion.

Serena had no doubt that he believed the story, and seemed more confused about how he’d managed to drink so much. Just for a second, she wondered if Irene hadn’t forcibly filled him with alcohol so she could get him here. Did her friend think she was so pathetic that she needed a man delivered to her doorstep in order to get some action?

She shook the thought away. “I’m really sorry about this, Tom. It’s just a misunderstanding that I wanted to explain before you jumped to any conclusions.” She moved all her body weight off her left leg and onto her right.

He ran a hand through his curls before going about the business of pulling his pants up around his hips. “You can’t blame me for trying,

though."

"No, I can't."

Tom winked at her. "Maybe after you get back to work, we can do this properly, and I can take you out to dinner and a movie, and see whatever happens after that. I mean, I've already seen you naked and know I definitely want *that* in the cards." He fastened the button, zipped up, and adjusted the leather belt. He stared at her, waiting for an answer.

She shrugged. "What about Evie?"

"Evie? She's just a workmate."

"I'm just a workmate."

"Yeah, but you're a very hot workmate! Evie's a married woman who's obviously bored in her marriage and gets her rocks off by buying me lunch," he answered honestly. "She's tried to get in my pants, literally speaking, but I'm not into married chicks."

"Oh, right."

"I am into you, though."

"Maybe one day," she finally answered.

"Cool. You know what?" He paused, looking a little uncomfortable. "Is it okay if I use your toilet for a sec?"

"Sure. I'll call a cab while you do that. Would you like a cup of coffee while you wait?"

"Yeah, I'd like that." He made his way toward the door and passed her. "Where's the bathroom?"

"It's the first door to your right. You can't miss it."

"Thanks," he said with a smile. He stopped just outside the doorway and looked over his shoulder. "How did I get here last night?"

"I think you should ask Irene that question."

"Yeah, I'll do that." He offered another pleasant smile and disappeared into the corridor.

Serena took a deep breath and slowly released it as her gaze returned to the ceiling. She could still pinpoint the exact spot where Noah had disappeared. She knew that even if she never crossed paths with Noah again, she wouldn't turn to Tom. Not after what she'd done with him, via Noah's influence.

She headed for her closet to pull out a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. She'd been naked around Tom long enough. There wasn't enough penance in the world to redeem her from the lies she'd just woven.

Chapter Eight

The mid-afternoon sun receded faster by the second, and darkness would soon engulf her living room. Tonight, she wouldn't bother with any of the lights and would continue to ignore the phone. She hadn't answered it all day. The little red light blinked on the answering machine to announce there were messages for her to listen to, but she'd already heard them—every single one was from Irene.

Serena craved the silence and darkness of loneliness and hoped it would wash through her body. Maybe it would eventually sweep away the yearning she had for a man she'd only met the day before. *Noah...* He wasn't entirely a man, but he had felt like one when he'd kissed and touched her.

That's because he used another man's body to get to you, she reminded herself.

No, that wasn't true. She could still feel *his* warm caress between her legs and along her skin.

There had been several times during the day when she'd been tempted to do yoga in hopes of connecting with him, but she couldn't get past sitting on the floor. She couldn't bring herself to cross her legs and experience the reminder of how he'd looked when he left her. She hadn't even bothered with any more unpacking. Her enthusiasm to do anything had been crushed.

The emptiness inside her grew worse than any she'd ever experienced the morning after a one-night stand. At least then she'd been

as willing to move on as the guy had.

Now, she felt the loss deep within. She felt stupid about the whole situation. The more time separating her from Noah, the more the encounter seemed surreal, as if he'd only been a figment of her imagination. Tom hadn't been an illusion, though. He'd been inside her bedroom, then the living room, and even sat at the kitchen counter when she made him a cup of coffee.

She still hadn't bought any groceries, and the leftover pizza didn't look quite as appetizing as it had the day before.

She could still smell Tom in her bed, and his unstained white shirt was a constant reminder. Relief had washed through her when she'd watched him leave and jump into a cab she'd called for him.

A knock on her front door made her jump.

Her hand went to her chest as she tried to calm her breathing. What was the point in answering? Irene had probably decided to drop in after leaving so many messages, but she wasn't in the mood for needless chatter. Not when she was trying to untangle the mess inside her heart and question her sanity.

The next knock didn't make her jump, but she closed her eyes, hoping the action would make Irene leave. *Go away!*

The persistent and continuous knocks increased with tenacity.

"Go away!" she finally called.

The knocking stopped, replaced by a simple statement. "I thought you didn't want me to go?"

Her calmed heartbeat strummed faster. Nerves tightened, and her voice failed her. All she managed was a whispered "Noah?" It couldn't be...could it?

"Serena."

She heard his voice even through the thick wooden door separating them. The fact he was able to knock made her mind race.

Her legs wobbled as she used the couch to help her to her feet. She still wore the jeans and the T-shirt she'd put on to hide her nakedness from Tom, and hadn't even bothered with a shower. It somehow felt right to keep the feel of Noah's touch on her body intact. If she held onto it, she

thought she could somehow keep him close.

By the time she stood in front of the door, she could feel him there. And not just because of the shadow on the floor. "Noah?" she whispered, placing a hand to the door.

"It's me, Serena," he whispered back.

Her heart beat as frantic as her breath. She felt lightheaded. When was the last time she ate? Probably the pizza from the day before, but she wasn't sure and hadn't wasted any thought on food or drink for hours.

She wrapped a hand around the doorknob as her other reached for the key to unlock the bolt. She hesitated, afraid that she might have totally lost her mind and could be imaging all of this.

"Open the door. Don't be afraid," he said in a smooth voice.

She sucked in a deep breath and turned the bolt and doorknob at the same time. Actions she'd made so many times since she'd started moving her stuff in last weekend now felt strange. She became aware of every move.

When she pulled the door inward, her heart stopped for a second. Her hands fell away from the door as she gawked at the dark eyes she'd been hoping to meet again. And now that he was here, she didn't know what to do, what to say. Her mouth felt as dry as her throat.

"Hey." He flashed a small smile.

"Hi." The word felt strange leaving her mouth. How could he be here in the flesh? The aura of bright light he'd had since the first time they'd crossed paths was now gone.

"Can I come in?"

"Sure." She held the door back and watched him walk inside. He wore a pair of faded jeans that fit snug around the hips and butt, but flared out wider at the legs. He was bare foot and still wearing the sleeveless T-shirt she remembered from his enlightened image. Now, she could clearly see the muscled contours of his arms and chest. He was much taller than she was, and had a slim frame packed with muscle. His physique made her gut tighten with desire.

He slowly turned around when he reached the couch, and sat down. His eyes remained on hers. The way his unruly hair hung around

his face made his cheekbones appear higher.

"Are you going to close the door?"

"Sorry," she mumbled. She didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable or paranoid, but she just couldn't get over the fact he was really here.

She closed and locked the door behind her before she headed toward him. She wanted to press her body against his and feel him beneath her fingertips, but fought the desire. She had to get more answers, and make sure she wasn't imagining this. As she lowered herself to sit on the coffee table in front of him, she reached out and touched his arm.

The firm corded muscles of his forearms shifted beneath her palm. She pulled away for a second before she returned, to a rounded bicep this time. "It's really you, isn't it?"

He nodded, and some of the dark hair fell over his face. Noah was even better looking in the flesh. The loss she'd felt inside her heart slowly melted away.

"I'm not imagining this?"

"No, you're not."

"What about everything else?" Her mind raced as her hand slipped away from his warm skin only to be caught by his.

He smoothed his palm over her fingers, lifted them to his lips, and kissed them. The sensation made her heart speed. *He's actually here!*

"All of it was real, every single detail you remember between us really happened."

The darkness in his eyes was so intense she couldn't stop looking into them. She noticed his pupils were so enlarged that his irises looked like thin, brown rims around them.

"I thought you were really gone," she whispered. It was all she could manage, and the sob that wanted desperately to get out remained buried inside.

"So did I." He squeezed her fingers tight in the palm of his hand. "When the pull took me upward, there was nothing I could do about it. I honestly thought I was finally free and headed toward what I'd aspired to reach for so long."

Her heart sank.

"But it wasn't what I wanted anymore. I wanted to stay here with you but knew that in that state it would be virtually impossible to venture into anything real." He paused to release a breath. "I hovered above the building, high in the sky for what felt like hours, before an invisible force pushed me downward." He looked into her eyes. "I saw you talking to the guy we used to... Are you sure he's not someone special to you?"

She shook her head but didn't look away. "There was a time when I hoped he would be, but no. He's just someone I work with."

"I'm sorry if I made things uncomfortable for you."

Serena shrugged. "I got around it. But please, tell me what happened to you."

He shook his head after staring at her for several seconds. "I, uh, my spirit was thrown downward with such force, I didn't know what hit me. Eventually, I realized I was back inside my own body."

"I don't understand," she said with a frown. "To be honest with you, I don't understand any of what happened to you. I thought this apartment was haunted."

Noah chuckled. "I suppose in a way it was. I wasn't a ghost, but my spirit had certainly elevated out of my body. And as I told you before, it was still in the same place I'd left it last week."

"And where was that?"

"In one of the apartments on the bottom floor."

"Not the one in the middle?"

He shook his head. "No, it's the one directly below yours, two floors down."

"But—"

"To explain all of this to you as completely as I understood it would be a waste of both of our times, especially since I no longer aspire to reach the enlightenment I wanted before." Noah leaned forward so their faces were close. So close, she noticed the dark stubble growing on his cheeks. "Let's just say that I took the road of a mystic, trying to find a greater existence to this crazy life when all I had to do was wait a little while longer to cross paths with my real purpose."

"And what's your real purpose?"

"You." He pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear. "I can't believe the inner peace I felt when we made love. I've never felt such calmness and belonging in my life."

"So, I made love to you, and not to...?" It was a stupid question she knew the answer to, but she needed to hear it confirmed by him.

"It was you and me in the bedroom. That man was only a conduit because I didn't have a physical body." A small smile curved his lips upward. "But I do now. I can't wait to be with you again, Serena. For real this time...."

"How did you know my name from the beginning?"

"I don't know. I just did. Maybe that's the real wonderment in all of this. That you and I were somehow meant to be. It looks like we might fill a void in each other that no one else has been able to occupy before."

She found herself nodding. It seemed the best and only way to put it. As far as she was concerned, Serena didn't care how stupid or clingy she sounded. She wanted this man in a way she'd never wanted anyone before. It had been such a primal and instant attraction that she couldn't help but think this was exactly where they were meant to be—with each other.

"I'm glad you agree."

"I do." Serena leaned forward, closing the distance between their mouths. She opened hers up to him, sweeping her tongue inside. When their tongues collided, electric shocks raced down her spine. She'd never felt like this from a kiss before, and she'd kissed many men in her time. Maybe deep down inside this was what she'd always wanted. Yet, she'd somehow settled for the role of a slut in her quest to find the man she needed in her life.

"You're even better to kiss now," he said as he pulled his lips off hers. His hand trailed over her face.

She closed her eyes to the sensations of his rough skin on her cheek. "I imagine it will be the same for other things." She pressed her palms against his firm chest, fearing that he'd disappear again if she took her hands off him. "I just want to cling to you, in case whatever higher power

took you the first time decides to take you again."

"No, that's not going to happen." Noah kissed the tip of her nose. "Do you hear me? I don't ever want to leave my body again. Well, until I've got no choice in death."

She placed an index finger over his lips and shook her head. "Don't say things like that."

His hands wrapped around her waist, one below the cotton fabric, and one on top. His touch warmed her skin, creating a heated flush to flow through her body. She moaned when his fingers traced around the front of her stomach.

"Can I say that I want to ravage you? Right now, right here?" he whispered in her ear.

"Oh, yeah, you can say it, but wouldn't you prefer to actually do it?"

"In the bedroom?"

"Well, the bedroom's comfortable, but I'd like to stay right here. For now," she said with a wink. "You know what they say about moving into a new place."

"What do they say?" He kissed his way down the side of her neck and spread the elastic collar of her T-shirt to finish at her collarbone.

"That it's good luck to make love in every room."

"Oh, is that what they say?" Noah cupped one of her breasts.

She shivered with desire, and her nipples tightened. She closed her eyes to the pleasure his touch aroused in her.

"No, open your eyes. I want you to see everything I do to you from now on."

He squeezed a nipple, and she fought the impulse to rip her clothes off, but desire won over. Her skin felt hot and bothered, and she wanted nothing more than to be naked beside him. "Noah..."

"Yeah?"

She playfully bit his earlobe before pulling away from his arms. She lifted the T-shirt over her head and dropped it on the coffee table. As she stood, she rolled her jeans down the length of her body and stepped out of them. She hadn't bothered with undergarments earlier and stood

completely naked in front of him. "How about we start right here?"

"Okay, that sounds and looks great to me." He paused to stare at her before he yanked off his own shirt over his head and lifted his butt off the couch long enough to strip off his jeans.

Serena lowered herself onto the couch, straddling him. She pressed her arms against the backrest and lowered her hips, engulfing his hard cock deep inside her. A calm that even yoga couldn't match spread within.

"Oh, Noah, this is what I've wanted since the moment we met," she whispered in his ear.

"Me too." His hands wrapped around her hips and started a rhythmic rise and fall that had her clitoris grinding against him.

She could hardly believe that they'd only met a day ago yet, now that they were physically connected, felt as right as if they'd been friends and lovers for years.

"Noah, this feels amazing." Her heart pounded so hard she was sure he felt it against his bare chest. Each time he lowered her, he did it harder, and the tingle of climax teased her a little more.

"Yes, it does." But nothing seemed to deter him from the process of lovemaking and the next time he pushed her hips down, she cried out his name for the whole world to hear.

A wave of ecstasy swept over her body, so fast and strong she was surprised when he arched his back and dug himself deeper inside. One last thrust before he came too. A mutual release that made her feel as if their very souls danced together.

This is total enlightenment,

She kissed his lips lightly and lifted her body off his lap.

"Whoa, wait a minute, where are you going?" He caught her hand.

Serena couldn't keep the smile from her face as she led him out of the living room and into the corridor. "Our next stop is the bathroom."

By the time they'd reached the doorway, he pushed her up against the wall and devoured her mouth with as much intensity as she felt.

Noah could insist he wasn't a mystic any longer, but the way she'd fallen for him could only be described as...mystical.

Author Bio

Yolanda lives in a suburb of Sydney, Australia with her wonderful husband, cute daughter, and adorable cat. She's been putting stories together since her early teens.

Now that her daughter's in school, she gets the opportunity to write every day, for most of the day and she loves every minute of it!

When she's not writing she spends as much time as possible with her small family. She also enjoys watching movies, TV shows and reading—she loves to read.

Come visit her website at www.yolandasfetsos.com, or MySpace page at www.myspace.com/yolandasfetsos.

You can also sign up for her newsletter at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/yolandasfetsos>.