

VIRTUAL LIFE

by Joni Latham

Kyleigh sat in front of her computer screen, rapping her fingers on the desktop. Back when she first started transferring her imagination to paper, she had no idea she would become so involved with her characters. Her imagination had always been with her and had remained unchanged from her childhood. It was only recently, that someone had persuaded her to write her stories, so that others could enjoy her fanciful imagination.

Her characters were so real that after she finished the first novel, she started writing a sequel, so she could keep them with her. Her heroine Kyleigh, named after herself, was everything she wanted to be and more. She was fearless and possessed supernatural abilities. The hero was a composite of her perfect man. An actor whom Kyleigh had a crush on at the time was the model for Kenyon. Since he had a recognizable face, he felt more real to her than any of the other characters.

To Kyleigh her life was very boring. Like most people she slept, ate, and went to work, but not much else. Her hopes were that her novel would breathe some life into her. Her life had definitely been more exciting while writing it. As she wrote, she became the heroine, experiencing and feeling every emotion and event that her character did. If a publisher accepted the novel, it would provide her the money and the opportunity to do and see things of her dreams. Unfortunately, it takes a long time for novels to make it through the rounds and reach someone's hands who wished to publish it. While she bided her time, she worked on the second novel. She found herself thinking of Kenyon more and more. He was little over six feet tall with a medium build, white hair, and piercing dark blue eyes. Always the impeccable English gentleman, very prim and proper, but with an underlying sensuousness. The longer she worked with her characters, the more real Kenyon became to her. Many nights when she had experienced a very trying day, she laid awake and looked at the wall, wishing that it would open up, allowing Kenyon to step out into her bedroom. He would arrive to whisk her back to his world, a world without all the modern conveniences but also without the worries that went with the modern world. Even

with its hardships of no electricity or automobiles, to her it was the perfect world, for Kenyon would be there.

As time passed and she heard nothing about the publication of her novel, Kyleigh grew restless and could not erase thoughts of Kenyon from her head. Thoughts of him invaded her every waking moment and disturbed her sleep. After months of fighting it, she finally decided to embrace the thoughts and accept them as part of her life. When she had done this, the turmoil inside her finally calmed, enabling her to relax and continue working on the second novel.

One night, Kyleigh finished the last chapter of the second novel. Piling the sheets on the table beside her, she tied a ribbon around them, then decided to take a long, hot bath. She stood up and stepped back, looking down at the stack of sheets that represented weeks of work and the lives of her characters.

Kyleigh shook her head and walked towards her bedroom. As the water ran into the bathtub, the bathroom filled with a thick cloud of steam. Turning off the faucet, Kyleigh settled into the hot water, closed her eyes, and leaned back to soak for a while. The warm water caressing her skin lulled her to sleep. A door opening in her bedroom jarred her awake. Grabbing her robe, she stood up and wrapped it around her. Very carefully, she stepped out of the tub and into the doorway to the bedroom.

A bright light to the right caught her eye. Looking in the direction of the light, she was startled to see the silhouette of a man. There was no way to escape, except back into the bathroom, so she stood very still. The man slowly stepped towards her, moving out of the blinding reflection of the light. As he neared, Kyleigh was shocked to discover that he displayed some of the same features and mannerisms of her Kenyon. The nearer he came to her, the more he looked like her hero. She was no longer afraid, just very curious about the source of the light and the identity of the man walking towards her. She waited, rather impatiently, in the doorway for the man to step into the light of the bathroom, so she could confirm her suspicions to his identity.

Finally, not able to stand the suspense, she called softly, "Kenyon?"

"Yes, My Darling."

It can't be. "You can't be Kenyon. He is a creation of my very vivid imagination." Shaking her head, she secretly hoped he really was her hero.

He stepped into the light of the bathroom. Reaching out, he touched her arm and said, "My Darling, I am your Kenyon. I have come to take you back with me, to take you home."

"Back with you?" Kyleigh questioned, shivering under his touch. "Back where? What home?"

Kenyon slipped his hand into hers and pointed towards the light. "Back through the portal and into your world, the world that you created. I have come to take you home, to take your place amongst us."

Kyleigh tightened her hand around Kenyon's. "Home, but what about the Kyleigh in your world? She is your love, your wife in that world."

Leaning towards her, he kissed her softly. "Remember, My Love. You are that Kyleigh. Everything that you are, you gave to her. You are one and the same."

"If I leave and stop writing, won't the world I created cease to exist?"

"No, My Darling. As long as you continue to exist, the world will exist." Kenyon wrapped his arms around her.

Kyleigh looked up at him, his face was exactly as she had pictured in her mind so many times. His expression was so kind, so loving, and so tender. She would be a total idiot, if she did not go with him. "Yes, I will go," she said softly, relaxing in his embrace. "But I need to dress, all I am wearing is this robe."

"No," he said releasing her and taking hold of her hand again. "Come just the way you are. You need nothing from this world, everything is there, waiting for you." He slowly pulled her towards the light. "Come," he beckoned.

Kyleigh resisted at first, then gave into the emotions in the back of her mind and allowed him to draw her towards the light. As she neared the source of the light, she began to see the outline of a door on a wall that had once been blank. Blinking her eyes several times, she looked again, and there was definitely a door on her blank wall. When she stood a few steps away from the door, she looked at the hand in hers, then up at his face, smiling down at her. There was nothing in her life that she felt was worth taking with her. She knew

that, for her, she was going to a better place and a better life. With that final thought, she followed Kenyon through the door, then turned to watch the door close on everything and everyone she had known for thirty-nine years. After the door closed, she tightened her grip on his hand and allowed him to lead her into her new world and her new life.

BANG!

Kyleigh fell back into the cold bath water. Shivering, she rubbed the knot on her head. "I've got to stop dreaming about my novels. It's getting to be dangerous."