

Laura

Alexander never forgot the first time he saw Laura – it was etched on his heart. Time itself had stood still as, transfixed, he'd watched the sunlight streaming through her long, flaxen hair. She seemed to have come from somewhere else, somewhere 'other,' and she was as pure as a meadow at dawn, her beauty as natural and miraculous as a star in the night sky or the birth of a child.

In that moment, Alexander knew he'd lay down his life for her. And the purpose of his own existence became clear – to love her with the intensity of a thousand suns.

Suddenly, everything was *in harmony*. He pondered the phrase, caught up in its profundity, and in his mind's ear he heard that heart-stopping climax in Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, where the strings surge heavenward. For him, it epitomised the ultimate victory of love over hate, good over evil. And like Ravel's glorious composition, Laura had opened in Alexander a door to a higher perception; and suddenly, because of her, he could somehow comprehend the wonder, the terror, the majesty of it all.

It was much more than a mere physical coupling when he and Laura made love. It was a spiritual union in which they became overwhelmed by the rhythm of wanting, giving, receiving, getting lost in each other to the extent that they merged completely. The love he'd shared with her transcended time and space, since it was as boundless as the soul itself. It traversed galaxies and universes instantly because it *was* those galaxies and universes. It embodied the essence of everything that was, is, and will be. Selfless, undying, eternal.

Such recollections were creating a powerful ache deep within Alexander as he sat opposite Laura's brother, Nicholas, in a secluded corner of Laura's favourite Mayfair restaurant. Two years earlier cancer had claimed her – she'd been just 35 – and now Alexander and Nicholas would occasionally meet for a meal in her memory. United in grief, Nicholas would celebrate his beloved sister, Alexander the woman who'd given his life meaning.

In the soft glow of the restaurant's flickering candlelight, Alexander meditated on Laura, which caused a solitary tear to trickle down his cheek. He thought of his first, stumbling words to her, the closeness of her beauty having rendered him almost speechless. He thought of her face – the full and generous lips which at each end curved ever so slightly downwards; the perfect nose that tapered to a point; and those lustrous, crystal-blue eyes which contained a surfeit of kindness and empathy. And he thought of that last, awful day in the hospice, when he'd held Laura in his arms as she'd slipped away into the silence of forever. He'd raged at God for taking her from him, yet the final, loving message in her eyes had been unmistakable: "We'll be together again."

But until then, he'd always see her in crowds she wasn't in.