

# *Silken Images*

*Volume 1 of the Two-Part Series*

*'Til The End Of Time*

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# PROLOGUE

## Cortona, Italy

A relentless ache dwelling within their innermost depths – ever foraging for soul food morsels from that other half ... the one who had been there since the beginning of time ... without them even knowing.

Until finally ... soulmates rising out of the ashes – alone, yet joined ... empty, yet full ... abandoned, yet belonging – now part of each other ... through every action ... in every thought ... of every moment ... one together.

Sweet wholeness – nothing able to steal away the joy found in a furtive look ... in the gentlest of touches ... in a heartfelt dance played out on hands that now forever awaken two spirits from the deepest of slumbers...

...not even that dark shadow ever lurking in that realm known as reality...

...ceaselessly hovering just on the other side of this newfound joy...

...to capture and steal and plunder a love that was theirs alone.

# PART ONE

*Brisbane, Australia*

*July 1988 to October 1988*

## Chapter 1

The sudden shaft of light seized his attention first but the reaction deep in his soul is what held him captive.

Only a minuscule fragment of time – a woman brushing a long strand of hair from her cheek as she raced into the dusty old theatre – but it was enough.

Lara had no idea of the picture she made bursting through the door. The soft glow from the streetlights framed her slender body, accentuating the smallness of her waist along with the fullness of long, glossy chestnut hair trailing behind as a silken shawl caught in a gentle breeze. She was late and hated feeling the eyes of the crowd already assembled on stage following her as she hurried down the aisle.

Ever increasing shivers of anticipation had accompanied her all day while preparing for this first rehearsal, but now trepidation and doubt dispersed any of those delicious ripples of expectation. After waiting what felt like a lifetime for this moment, despite her youthful twenty-five years, now those dreams were on the brink of becoming a reality.

She had no warning her world was about to alter in the space of a moment, nor that the intense emotions about to be birthed deep within her very soul – along with the inconceivable heartache loving this deeply entailed – would endure for the rest of her life. Yet, if she had ... she wouldn't have changed a thing.

"Hurry up, Lara," the director called from the darkened stage. "We're just about to start."

Racing up the stairs, she then slid shyly amongst the other players, the touch of a smile flitting across her full lips and making her clear sapphire-blue eyes sparkle as she regained some of that former enthusiasm.

"Sorry, Paul, there was an accident on the way here. I'll make sure I'm not late again."

"Okay, well let's get this show on the road," he replied, hurriedly introducing her to the others.

"You'll be okay, young lady. We've all been late some time," came a reassuring aside from Charles, a tall handsome man who looked to be in his early fifties with his thick grey hair and warm smile. His caring manner reminded Lara of her favourite uncle. Sending her a friendly wink, he gently patted her arm as everyone took their places.

The strains of the melodies from *Show Boat* filled the cavernous hall as they rehearsed the first few numbers. As though drawn there, she found her eyes constantly sought out the male lead as he executed the demanding role with a voice that seemed to touch the deepest part of her soul.

*Who are you?* The phrase tumbled around her fascinated imaginings as she contemplated why a more prominent company than this little suburban troupe hadn't snapped him up already ... but there was no time to dwell on those thoughts. This was her first night and she needed to concentrate on everything else that was going on.

Lara's heart soared as she grasped the high notes and Charles smiled when he glanced across to see her face light up with the wonder of performing, even if it was only to the rest of the cast and a few spiders hanging suspended in gossamer threads high above in the claustrophobic darkness.

Lara was unaware a pair of dark eyes silently followed her from the other side of the stage. The shadows were a welcome camouflage as this unknown admirer furtively gazed at the picture she created while losing herself in the music. The man hungered to reach out and touch the space surrounding her – that gentle allure was almost tangible – but he dare not. Instead, his gaze became the caress he so longed to impart.

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Paul put his hands together, congratulating each one of them as the rehearsals ended. "That was great, everyone. Just remember to practise any chance you get and I'll see you back here same time next week." On his way out he patted her arm, then, with an affirming nod, added, "Good job, Lara."

Her spirit soared at the musical director's words. Spilling out onto the darkened street, she soon found herself carried along with the rest of the group, all enthusiastically encouraging each other as they went. Their excitement was contagious.

"See you next week, young lady," her new friend called over his shoulder with a smile as he ran to his car to get out of the cold.

"Wouldn't miss it and thanks for your support, Charles," she replied returning his wave. Several bars from the rousing music still filled her mind and she sauntered along with a cheerful smile.

The newcomer was in no hurry to get home, relishing the elation of a successful evening and completely oblivious to the chilly night air. *Finally, I've found my voice again! I can't believe how alive I feel. This is what I've been dreaming of forever.* Humming to herself, she tossed her bag onto the front passenger seat before climbing in.

Across the road, a tall figure with dark expressive eyes silently followed her progress. Glimpsing the array of emotions playing across her face, the man found it almost impossible to restrain a wistful smile as he remembered that feeling of elation when his own voice had been set free. It was during his first production six years ago – when he was just twenty-two years of age. Since then, singing had become his escape and it wasn't hard to recognise that same thrill in her.

As he watched her drive away, the smile turned to resignation ... then, with a heavy sigh, this stranger slowly turned and walked amongst the shadows, reluctant to return to the only reality he knew.

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"Nikki, it was wonderful!" Lara exclaimed the following morning, scooping a petite four-year-old child into her arms. "You should've heard the music and the people were so friendly. It was like a dream come true. I can't wait for opening night so I can sing to you in the audience." The little girl's long dark hair, so similar to her mother's, flowed around them as she twirled her daughter round and round and the cosy cottage resounded with contagious giggles.

The young woman's eyes sparkled as she recalled tossing and turning before eventually falling asleep in the early hours of the morning. The rehearsal had filled her with confidence as the lyrics continuously cascaded through her mind. Surprisingly, Lara welcomed the sleeplessness – it was far too long since she had experienced this much anticipation and satisfaction.

Sadly, she had known too many hard times and a different kind of sleeplessness over the years. Since Tom's sudden and horrifying departure, a steely determination ensured her world revolved around making a home filled with love for Nikki. Unfortunately, a lack of finances with no support from a partner meant life had dealt her more hard knocks over the three years they had been on their own.

The little girl was her constant delight and she had brought love and laughter back into her days. Yet, deep down, there was a part of Lara's soul still yearning for something more, especially as she watched her daughter growing a little more independent each day. It was inevitable one day Nikki would stretch her wings and head off to live her own life. For now though, she was content to put her small daughter's needs first and dole out as much love and attention as she could.

Since becoming a single parent, Lara lived by an ever-present motto; God would only ever give her this particular 'today' once so she might as well smile and make the most of it. The thought spurred her on to enjoy every moment, no matter what else was going on in her life. Of course, having a young one to care for often pushed that resolve to one side in order to deal with the latest crisis, yet this same cheerful disposition usually brought her back to a place of contentment and anticipation of better things to come.

Determined to keep this new euphoric feeling alive for as long as possible, with a tight goodbye hug for Nikki when she dropped her off at kindergarten, Lara then jumped on the bus to her job in the city. There was a spring in her step as she once again focussed on the music from the night before. As always, it took her to that special place where she became lost in the strains flowing through her soul.

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She and Tom had married not long after graduating from the creative academy where film editing had been her chosen field. He was training to become a cinematographer at the same institute. The heady business swept them along in its wake as the newlyweds imagined the exciting opportunities they would soon be able to undertake together.

When Lara fell pregnant long before either of them had planned, suddenly the cares and responsibilities of a tiny baby took over their lives. Her greatest desire had always been to raise Nikki in a normal family home rather than the dishevelled closet boxes so many of her peers called home because of their crazy work hours and hectic lifestyles. Sadly, those dreams had slowly fallen away around her. Tom's long and unpredictable hours soon brought tension into their relationship – along with the frequent drunken parties accompanying his line of work and the attractive young starlets he met along the way. Despite this, every now and then she silently envied his exhilaration when he brought home tales of the people involved in a shoot and the places his work took him.

Every now and then ... until that night.

Finding herself left as a sole parent after the breakup meant financial pressures had driven Lara back into the workforce. She had always been meticulous at her craft so it didn't take long to find an employer who was willing to fit around her restricted lifestyle. Now she enjoyed heading into the office and being part of this exciting, fast-paced world again.

Her sense of anticipation had been growing all week long while going about her work as an assistant film editor in a small Brisbane suite. It wasn't long before her boss recognised the subtle transformation. With eyebrows raised, David grinned to himself as she sat in front of a large flatbed, humming notes that were fast becoming the focus of her days and nights. It was obvious she couldn't wait for Thursday night to come around again.

"It won't be long till you're receiving the Best New Talent Award at the Arias if you come across like that on stage. Then I'll be editing your work along with all this!" David joked when another song trilled from her lips as she prepared to leave for the day.

"Sure, as if that's ever going to happen," came the cheeky retort.

Being the recipient of an Aria Award was every Australian singer's dream. As she called out a cheery, "Bye," a tiny spark lit up her spirit at the thought of such a feat coming to pass. Not surprisingly,

bucket-loads of doubt soon rose up again and Lara silently chided herself for reaching for stars way beyond her grasp. The door banged loudly behind her as she hurried for the bus.