

#1 BESTSELLER

BARBARA  
TAYLOR  
BRADFORD

Author of A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

The  
Women  
in His Life



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THE  
WOMEN  
IN  
HIS LIFE

*Barbara Taylor Bradford*

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In the blockbuster story-telling tradition that is Barbara Taylor Bradford's hallmark, here is an extraordinary novel of a remarkable man—and the women who love him.

## THE WOMEN IN HIS LIFE

He is Maximilian West—billionaire tycoon and corporate raider extraordinaire. He is a figure of almost mythical power—an enigma to all who know him, a stranger even to himself. But when his world is suddenly and irrevocably shattered, Maxim must make peace with his turbulent past and begin to understand the remarkable women who have loved him, protected him, and lost him: Ursula, his mother; Theodora, his devoted nanny; Anastasia, an artistic French beauty and his first love; Camilla, the renowned English actress; and Adriana, an American business tycoon.

From the streets of London to the suites of New York, from the rise of Nazi Germany to the fall of the Berlin Wall, **THE WOMEN IN HIS LIFE** takes us on an unforgettable journey of survival, secrets, love, and redemption that mesmerizes from the first page to the last.

BARBARA TAYLOR  
BRADFORD



*Also by Barbara Taylor Bradford:*

**A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE  
VOICE OF THE HEART  
HOLD THE DREAM  
ACT OF WILL  
TO BE THE BEST**

This book is for Bob, who means  
all the world to me, and without  
whom it could not have been written.

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This is a work of fiction. The situations and scenes described, other than those of historical events, are all imaginary. With the exception of well-known historical figures, none of the characters portrayed are based on real people, but were created from the imagination of the author. Any similarity, therefore, to anyone living or dead is purely coincidental.



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## PART ONE

*Maximilian*

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## LONDON-NEW YORK

1989

A man who stormed and captured  
so many citadels which in his  
boyhood and youth must have  
seemed as fantastical and  
unobtainable as Ali Baba's cave.  
A man of many lives.

Melvyn Bragg, *Richard Burton: A Life*





HE CAME OUT OF THE IMPOSING HOUSE ON THE CORNER of Chesterfield Hill and Charles Street and stood for a moment poised on the front step. It had rained earlier, and the dampness lingered and the air was raw on this chilly Thursday evening in January.

Normally oblivious to the weather, he found himself shivering and turned up the collar of his black trench coat. The weather underscored his morose mood, his sense of desolation. For a long time there had been a deep sadness inside him; tonight, for some reason, it seemed more acute than usual.

Pushing his hands into his pockets, he forced himself to stride out, heading in the direction of Berkeley Square. He walked at a rapid pace along Charles Street, his step determined, his back straight, his head held erect. He was dark-haired with dark-brown eyes, tall, lean, trimly built. There was an athletic hardness about his body, and this was echoed in his lean and angular face, its rawboned sharpness softened by a deep tan. He was an exceptionally handsome man, in his mid-fifties, and his name was Maximilian West.

He cursed mildly under his breath, wondering at the heaviness he felt, and regretting that he had agreed to this meeting set for such a late hour. He had done so impulsively—he who was rarely impulsive—out of deference to his old school friend Alan Trenton. Alan had made Maxim's presence tonight sound so vitally important. But eight-forty-five was late even for Maxim West, renowned though he was for being ready to do business at any time of the day or night, any day of the week; and he had another appointment, for dinner that evening. What saved the situation was that Alan's office was only a stone's

throw away from the late-night dining club where he had a table booked for nine-thirty.

He circled Berkeley Square, dodging the traffic as he made for the far side, wondering why Alan needed to see him, what this was all about. When Alan had telephoned the house earlier, his voice had vibrated with urgency, yet he had been curiously reticent. Intrigued, Maxim had agreed to stop by, but now he was acutely aware of the time, reminding himself that Alan was talkative, could be a bit long-winded on occasion. He would have to keep his eye on the clock, move the meeting along with a degree of rapidity.

Oh what the hell, he thought, as he reached the corner of Bruton Street. Alan's been special to me for most of my life. I owe him . . . we go back so far, he knows so much—and he's my best friend.

Crossing the street, his eyes focused on the Jack Barclay showroom on the opposite corner, and when he reached the plate-glass windows he paused to admire the sleek Rolls-Royces and Bentleys gleaming under the brilliant spotlights. He was always promising himself one of these superdeluxe models, but he never seemed to get around to buying it. On the other hand, he did not have much need for a car for his personal use anymore. Corporate jets that sped around the world were more his style these days, and when he was on the ground there were company limousines at his disposal.

He walked on past the Henley car showroom and Lloyds bank, and pushed through the doors of Berkeley Square House. He nodded to the security guard, who touched his cap in recognition. This was the best commercial address in town and a powerhouse of a building. Here, floor upon floor, were housed the great international corporations and the multinationals, companies that had more financial clout than the governments of the world. Maxim thought of the buff-colored edifice as a mighty treasury of trade, for it did hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of business a year. And yet it had no conspicuous face; had long since blended into the landscape of this lovely, leafy square in the very heart of Mayfair, and most Londoners who walked past it daily were hardly aware of its existence. But it was the British base for an amazing number of megacorporations and the spot where the big bucks stopped.

Maxim crossed the richly carpeted white-marble hall,

stepped into the elevator and rode up to Alan Trenton's offices on the sixth floor. Responding to his knock, Trenton's secretary of many years opened the door and smiled warmly when she saw Maxim standing there. "Good evening, Mr. West. Oh dear, I'm so sorry. I mean—Sir Maximilian!"

He brushed aside her apologies and flashed a dazzling smile. "Hello, Evelyn," he said, shrugging out of his trench coat. She ushered him toward Trenton's inner sanctum. "He's waiting for you."

Alan Trenton was standing next to a carved mahogany console of Chippendale design, pouring Roederer Cristal Brut into a silver tankard. He was Maxim's age, yet appeared older. He was stout, of medium height, fair of coloring and slightly balding above a ruddy face.

"Maxim!" he exclaimed, his pale-blue eyes lighting up with the most obvious pleasure. He put the bottle of Cristal down with a clatter, and hurried across the room. Grasping Maxim's hand, he half embraced his oldest and dearest friend. "It's good to see you," he said.

"And you, Alan. It's been too long, and my fault."

"No problem, I understand," Alan beamed. "I know I've said it on the phone, but I feel I must say it to you in person. Congratulations, Maxim, on your very great honor."

"Thanks, Stubby," Maxim said, reverting to his old nickname for Trenton from their schooldays. "Who'd have thought it, eh?"

"I would've, Duke, that's who," Alan shot back, using the name he had bestowed on Maxim some thirty years before. "And thanks for coming at such short notice, I know how pressed you are."

"And why *am* I here?" Maxim's gaze turned quizzical, a dark brow lifted.

Trenton did not at first respond. He stepped over to the console, lifted the bottle. "A drop of bubbly, old chap?"

"Thanks, but not really," Maxim said, then realizing the champagne was in his honor, he added quickly, "Oh, why not? But do make it a drop."

Maxim watched as Trenton dispensed the champagne, waiting for him to come to the point of the meeting. But when he didn't, Maxim strolled into the middle of the room and glanced around.



Alan had recently finished redecorating his office, and Maxim liked the new ambience. A sense of elegance and warmth had been created, with pine-paneled walls, fine English antiques and bucolic landscapes of the English countryside hanging in elaborate carved and gilded frames. All bespoke Trenton's lifelong predilection for ancient objects and artifacts, which had developed into a very serious and consuming hobby. He had become a well-known collector, an avid bidder at auctions. All that oil money to spend, Maxim commented to himself. North Sea oil money. Big Texas oil money. He had encouraged Alan to pursue his own ideas, to expand the family business after he had taken over from his father, had backed him to the hilt in every way, giving him moral and financial support. The combination had worked, and Alan's great prosperity over the past fifteen years pleased Maxim tremendously.

A moment later Trenton handed Maxim the champagne. They clinked tankards. Alan said, "Here's to your title. Wear it in good health, old chap."

Maxim couldn't help laughing. "Thanks, Stubby, and here's to you." Maxim tasted the icy Cristal, liking its dryness. He took another sip, then said, "So, Alan, what *is* this all about?"

Trenton eyed him speculatively. "How would you like to be a white knight?"

Maxim stared at him. It was the last thing he had expected.

"To come to the rescue of Lister Newspapers, I presume," Maxim said at last, and it was Trenton's turn to be taken aback. "Someone else has already approached you!" he exclaimed, managing to make his words sound like both a statement and a question.

Maxim shook his head. "Not at all. But that's the only company in London facing a hostile takeover bid, at least that I'm aware of. And anyway, how come you're involved?"

"In actuality, I'm not," Trenton was quick to say. "I'm sort of"—he paused, groped for a word—"a go-between. It's John Vale, my merchant banker, who is the one involved. The merchant bank acts for Lister Newspapers and John is very close to the chairman, Harry Lister, and is seeking to help him. He's aware we're old friends and asked me to arrange this meeting."

"But it's hardly my bailiwick, I'm not interested in—" Maxim abruptly broke off as he saw the door open.

"Ah, there you are, John," Trenton said, hurrying to greet the newcomer, his hand outstretched. "Come in! Come in!"

"Hello, Alan," John Vale said, shaking Trenton's hand. He was in his late thirties, of average height, wiry, very English in appearance, with a fair skin, streaky blond hair and light-gray eyes behind thick tortoiseshell glasses. He allowed Trenton to propel him across the room to where Maxim stood.

"Maxim, I'd like to introduce John Vale of Morgan Lane," Trenton said. "And, of course, this is Sir Maximilian West, John."

"Glad to meet you," Maxim said.

"It's my very great pleasure, Sir Maximilian," John Vale responded, endeavoring to conceal his avid curiosity. Maximilian West was one of the world's most brilliant tycoons, and a buccaneer, like Sir James Goldsmith and Lord Hanson, both shrewd operators in the takeover game. West more than outmatched them, at least in John Vale's opinion.

Leaving the two men, Alan went over to the console, exclaiming, "Champagne coming up, John."

"Thanks," Vale replied, turned to Maxim and began to make small talk, all the while studying him. West was power personified; it seemed to emanate from him. Vale had not expected such a good-looking man, though. There was something spectacular about that wide engaging smile, the very white teeth, the dark eyes filled with vivid intelligence. And that tan! It was the golden tan of a playboy acquired in some exotic winter playground, not that of a workaholic conglomerateur who spent the majority of his time cooped up in boardrooms and circling the globe in his private jet. The clothes were equally unexpected, hardly the usual drab garb of a typical businessman. More like movie-star clothes, Vale thought, eyeing the gray pure-silk shirt, the pearl-gray silk tie, the superbly cut black gabardine suit that hung on West with such precision it had undoubtedly been engineered by the world's greatest tailor for a large quantity of money. But John Vale recognized at once that there was an intense glamour about Maxim West that had more to do with his own personal magnetism than with his sartorial elegance.

Trenton's voice interrupted Vale's thoughts and the discussion he was having with Maxim West about the filthy English weather and other trivialities.

"Here you go, John, some champagne, and now we can get down to business. Or rather, the two of you can. Although I've brought you and Sir Maximilian together, I intend to sit back and be the silent observer."

Maxim chuckled. "The day you do that I guarantee it'll snow gold bricks. You haven't paused to draw breath since you uttered your first word," he said, but there was no hint of criticism in his voice, only warmth and great affection.

Alan threw back his head and laughed. "I suppose there's some truth in what you say. And *you* should know—after the forty-five years or more we've been together."

The three men drank, and Trenton gestured to a group of chairs around a Georgian occasional table. "Shall we sit?"

Once they were settled, Trenton glanced at John Vale and said, "I told Maxim why I asked him to come over this evening. I think you should elucidate further."

Vale nodded, gave his attention to Maxim. "Firstly, I'd like to know whether you would be interested in being the white knight for Lister Newspapers."

Maxim frowned. "I honestly don't know. Just before you arrived, I had started to say to Alan that I didn't think a newspaper empire was my bailiwick exactly."

"But why not?" Trenton demanded peremptorily, forgetting his vow of silence of a moment ago. "Surely it's a perfect acquisition for you at this stage of your career. Think of the added power and influence you would have if you controlled Lister. A national daily, a national Sunday newspaper and a galaxy of prestigious magazines."

Maxim threw Alan a swift look but did not respond. Instead he addressed John Vale. "What makes you think I'd be acceptable to the stockholders?"

"Harry Lister is certain of it, so are the other members of the Lister board. I agree with them, as do the directors of Morgan Lane." Vale perched precariously on the edge of his seat, leaned forward and fixed his bespectacled, earnest gaze on Maxim. "You have the name, a formidable reputation and an extraordinary track record. You're not an asset stripper, far from it. The companies you have taken over have flourished under your good management. These things are tremendous points in your favor. Quite frankly, you're impressive, very impressive indeed, and that's why we're absolutely positive you'd