

THE INTERNATIONALLY BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF *EVERYTHING TO GAIN* AND
A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

BARBARA
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BRADFORD

To Be
the Best



BARBARA
Taylor
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TO BE THE BEST

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FOR BOB
who is.
With my love.

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	1
LOVERS AND STRANGERS	9
SAINTS AND SINNERS	255
WINNERS AND LOSERS	361
Epilogue	475

PROLOGUE

To be on my team, you've got to be the best. And to be the best, you've got to have character.

—EMMA HARTE IN *A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE*

Paula left Pennistone Royal just before dawn.

It was still dark as she eased the car out of the tall iron gates and turned left, heading for the moors. But as she came up onto the road which cut through the Pennine Chain of hills, the sky was already beginning to change. Its blurred mass of anthracite grays was giving way to amethyst and pink and a cold and fading green, and on the far horizon the first rays of the sun shimmered like shards of silver against the dark rim of the moors. It was an eerie hour, neither day nor night, and the silent spacious moors seemed emptier and more remote than ever. And then unexpectedly there was a sudden burst of radiance and that crystalline light so peculiar to the north of England filled the entire sky and day finally broke.

Paula rolled down the window and took a deep breath, then leaned back in the seat, relaxing as she pushed the car forward at a steady speed. The breeze that blew in was cool, but then it was always cool up here on the "tops" whatever the time of year and hardly the right place to gauge the weather. She knew it would be a scorching day again, and she was glad she had set out for Fairley early.

It was the end of August when the heather always blooms in Yorkshire and the wild, untenanted moors were glorious. Grim and daunting for most of the year, they were breathtaking in their beauty this morning, a sea of violet and ma-

genta rippling under the wind, rolling ahead as far as the eye could see. On an impulse Paula stopped the car and got out, glancing around, filling her eyes. The landscape was awesome . . . stunning. She felt her throat tighten with emotion. Grandy's moors, she murmured, thinking of Emma Harte. I love them just as much as she did . . . as my own daughters, Tessa and Linnet, have grown to love them too.

Paula stood for a moment by the car, savoring her surroundings, looking and listening. She could hear the sharp trilling of the larks as they soared and wheeled high on the clouds and in the distance was the tinkling of water as a little beck rushed down over rocky crags, and on the cool and lucent air were the mingled scents of heather and bilberry, wildflowers and bracken. She closed her eyes briefly, remembering so many things, and then she lifted her head and looked up. The inverted bowl of a sky was China blue and filled with white puffball clouds and brilliant sunshine. The beginning of a pretty day, she thought, smiling inwardly. There is nowhere like the moors when the weather is beautiful, nowhere in the whole world. It was a long time since she had been up here. Too long really. My roots are here, just as Grandy's were, she thought, lingering a moment longer, the memories flooding her fully, carrying her back . . .

Abruptly, Paula turned away, got into her Aston Martin DB 2-4, and drove on, following the winding moorland road for another hour until it finally started its descent into the valley below, and Fairley. Because it was so early, the village still slumbered. The streets were entirely deserted. Paula parked in front of the ancient gray stone church with its square Norman tower and stained-glass windows, then she alighted, went round to the passenger door, and opened it. She had wedged the cardboard box on the floor near the seat, and now she lifted the vase of summer flowers out of the box and closed the door with her knee.

Carrying the vase with both hands, she pushed through the lych-gate that led into the cemetery adjoining the church.

Her steps carried her down the flagged path until she

came to the far corner, secluded, bosky, infinitely still. Here, near the ancient moss-covered stone wall and shaded by a gnarled old elm tree, were a cluster of graves. For a while she stood staring at one headstone.

Emma Harte was the name engraved upon the dark green marble, and below were the dates 1889–1970.

Eleven years ago, Paula thought. She died eleven years ago today. Whatever has happened to the time? It has spun away from me so fast . . . it seems like only yesterday she was alive and vigorous and running her business and ordering us all around in her inimitable way.

Moving closer to her grandmother's grave, Paula bent down, placed the flowers on it, then straightened and stood motionless with one hand resting on the headstone, staring out toward the distant hills. There was a reflective look in her eyes, and she was lost for a moment in the sweep of her thoughts.

I've got to do something, Grandy, something drastic you wouldn't like. But I'm certain you'd understand my reason . . . that I want to create something of my own. If you were in my position you'd do exactly the same thing. I know you would. And it'll come out right. It must. There is no room for doubt.

The striking of the church clock split the silence like thunder, made Paula start, and brought her out of her reverie with a jolt.

After another moment or two she turned away from Emma's grave and let her eyes roam over the other headstones. They came to rest on David Amory's, then moved on to regard Jim Fairley's . . . her father . . . her husband . . . who had lain here for ten years. They had both been far too young to die. Sadness struck at her with such sharpness she caught her breath in surprise and her heart filled with an old familiar ache. She steadied herself, spun around, and continued along the path, clamping down on the pain and sadness the memories engendered in her. She reminded herself that life was for the living.

Paula broke her rapid pace only once, when she passed the private plot which stood close to the church. Encircled

by iron railings, it was filled with the graves of Jim's forebears . . . Adam and Adele . . . Olivia . . . Gerald. So many Fairleys . . . just as there were so many Hartes buried here. Two families whose lives had been entwined for three generations . . . bound together in a bitter feud . . . and in love and hate and revenge and marriage . . . and finally in death. Here they lay, together in their eternal resting place under the shadow of the windswept moors, at peace at last in this benign earth . . .

As the lych-gate clicked behind her, Paula straightened up, threw back her shoulders, and hurried to the car, a new determination in her step, a new resoluteness in her expression. There was so much ahead of her, so many challenges, so much she had to accomplish.

She got into the car and settled herself comfortably for the long drive ahead of her.

The tape was on the passenger seat where she had placed it earlier that morning in readiness for the journey. After slipping it into the player in the dashboard, she turned up the volume. The strains of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony filled the car . . . rich, melodious, so full of spirit and vivacity and, for her at least, a soaring hope. It was one of her favorites. Tessa had bought the tape for her a few weeks ago. It was the latest recording. Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berliner Philharmoniker. Paula shut her eyes, letting the music wash over her, thrilling to the first movement . . . *allegro vivace* . . . it made her feel . . . uplifted.

A moment passed, and then another, and she opened her eyes finally, turned on the ignition, and coasted down the hill, making for the Leeds-Bradford Road, which would lead her onto the M1, the motorway going south to London. She swung onto it thirty minutes later and saw at once that the traffic was light. There were only a few stray cars on the road and no trucks at all. If she was lucky and continued to have a clear run, she would be sitting behind her desk at Harte's in Knightsbridge within four hours.

Picking up speed, Paula roared ahead, her foot hard down on the accelerator, her eyes fixed on the road.

The symphony swelled to a crescendo, fell away, rose again, enveloping her in its beauty, transporting her with its magic. She experienced a surge of real happiness. Her mind was vividly alive. She could see the months ahead very clearly, knew with a sureness that thrust deep into her soul that she was right in everything she intended to do.

She increased her speed. The Aston Martin flew forward along the motorway as if it had wings and were airborne. She was enjoying the feel of this superb piece of machinery under her hands, enjoying the sense of control she felt . . . control of the car, of herself, of the future. She had made her plan. *Her master plan*. She intended to execute it as soon as possible. It was watertight. Nothing could possibly go wrong . . .

LOVERS AND STRANGERS

CALL NO MAN FOE, BUT NEVER LOVE A STRANGER.

—STELLA BENSON

*BE NOT FORGETFUL TO ENTERTAIN STRANGERS: FOR THEREBY
SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED ANGELS UNAWARES.*

—THE BIBLE: HEBREWS

*MY TRUE-LOVE HATH MY HEART, AND I HAVE HIS,
BY JUST EXCHANGE ONE FOR THE OTHER GIVEN:
I HOLD HIS DEAR, AND MINE HE CANNOT MISS,
THERE NEVER WAS A BETTER BARGAIN DRIVEN.*

—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

CHAPTER ONE

Paula walked into her private office at the London store with her usual briskness, and after removing several folders from her briefcase, she sat down at the antique partners' desk in the corner. It was precisely at this moment that she noticed the buff-colored envelope propped against the antique porcelain lamp.

Marked PERSONAL, it had apparently been hand-delivered, and she recognized the writing at once. She felt a small shiver of pleasure. Eagerly, she reached for the envelope, slit it open with the gold-and-jade paper knife, and took out the folded piece of paper.

The note was boldly penned.

Meet me in Paris. Tonight, it said. You're booked on Flight 902. British Airways. 6 p.m. I'll be waiting impatiently. Usual place. Don't disappoint me.

Paula frowned. The tone was peremptory, commanding, and implicit in his words was the assumption she would go. Mild irritation at his high-handedness flared and diluted the flush of pleasure she had experienced a second before. Of course she wouldn't go. She couldn't. She must spend the weekend with her children as planned, *wanted* to spend it with them, in fact.

Still clutching the note, she leaned back in the chair and gazed into space, thinking about him. Bossy . . . conceited . . . those were the adjectives which sprang into her head.

They were certainly appropriate. A trace of a smile surfaced, flickered on her mouth. She was suddenly amused by the invitation and sorely tempted to accept. Admit it, you'd love to spend the weekend in Paris with *him*. But then you'd love to do a lot of things you constantly pass up, a small voice at the back of her head reminded her. And she smiled again, though this time with wryness, a hint of regret even, knowing that she could never be indulgent with herself. Perish the thought! Duty had to come first. That little rule of Emma Harte's had been inculcated in her since childhood, although sometimes she wished her grandmother had not been so thorough. But Grandy had schooled her well, had taught her that wealth and privilege also meant responsibilities, and that they had to be shouldered without flinching, no matter what the cost to oneself. And since she was now thirty-six, almost thirty-seven, her character was hardly likely to change at this stage in her life.

Paula sat up, slipped the note back into its envelope, sighing under her breath as she did. A romantic interlude in her favorite city with that very special and exceptional man was infinitely appealing but decidedly not possible. No, she would not go to Paris for a weekend of love and intimacy and pleasure. Instead, she would go to her children and be a good mother. Her children needed her. After all, she had not seen them for two weeks. On the other hand, she had not seen him either . . .

"Damn and blast," she muttered out loud, wishing he had not sent the note. It had thrown her off balance, made her feel unexpectedly restless, and at a moment in time when she could not afford to have distractions of any kind. The months ahead were going to be extremely complicated, and they would be crucial months.

And so she would phone him later, tell him she was not coming; she must also cancel the airline reservation he had made for her. On second thought, perhaps she ought to call British Airways immediately.

As she reached for the telephone it began to ring.

She picked up swiftly, said, "Hello?" and glanced at the door as her assistant, Jill, hurried in with a cup of coffee.

“Hello, Paula, it’s me,” her cousin Alexander was saying at the other end of the phone. “I came into the Leeds store looking for you, only to find that on the *one* day I’m up here, you’re in London.”

“Oh Sandy darling, I *am* sorry to have missed you,” she exclaimed, then covered the mouthpiece, murmured her thanks to Jill, who placed the coffee in front of her, smiled, and disappeared.

Paula went on, “Were you in Yorkshire last night?”

“Yes. I got in around six-thirty.”

“I was still at the store, Sandy. You should’ve called me. We could’ve had dinner.”

“No, we couldn’t. You see, I had to get out to Nutton Priory as early as possible. My estate manager’s going off on holiday today and we had a lot to go over.” Alexander paused, cleared his throat. “You were at Grandy’s grave this morning . . . those *are* your flowers, aren’t they, Paula?”

“Yes,” she said, her voice growing softer. “I went there very early, before driving to London.”

“I was close on your heels.” He laughed faintly. “I suppose we just weren’t meant to meet up today. Well . . . my loss.”

Paula loved her cousin dearly and thus was sensitive to his moods. She had caught something odd in his voice, a nuance that disturbed her. “Sandy, do you have some sort of problem?” she asked quickly. “Do you want to talk to me about anything?”

There was only the slightest hesitation before he exclaimed with a certain firmness, “No, no, not at all! I merely thought it would be nice for us to lunch together, I haven’t seen you for weeks. I realize you’ve been busy . . . however, I do miss our tête-à-têtes, old thing.”

Paula had been listening attentively, straining to catch that peculiar inflection she had noticed a moment ago, but now it was absent. His voice sounded perfectly normal—well-modulated and controlled, as it always was.

She said, “Yes, I miss them too, Sandy, and it has been a bit hectic for me this summer, what with all the flying to the south of France and back, and staying ahead of the game with the business. And look here, whilst I have you on the