

INTRODUCTION FOR THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION OF A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

INTRODUCTION

When A Woman of Substance was published thirty years ago I was thrilled. And also very surprised when the book, my first novel, became such a runaway bestseller. What amazed me even more was that it was at the top of the bestseller charts in so many other countries, and in a variety of foreign languages. You see, when I had finished writing the book it occurred to me that perhaps it was a little too parochial, since so much of it was set in my native Yorkshire.

My French publisher soon set me straight about that. “Nobody cares that much about location,” he explained. “It’s Emma that intrigues and captivates. We all become enmeshed in her story and want to keep reading about her, to see how she ends up.”

Well, she ended up being a role model for women around the world. I soon discovered that Emma both inspired and empowered women of all ages. She was strong and brave, bold and fearless, and she broke the glass ceiling long before that phrase was even invented. In many ways she redefined a new generation of women, and she still does today... in ninety countries and forty languages. And all I wanted to do was tell a good tale about an enterprising woman who makes it in a man’s world when women weren’t doing that.

I suppose I succeeded more than I realized at the time. Emma and her life story captured everybody’s imagination, and still does.

Tough and often ruthless, brilliant when it came to dissimulations, she was an amazing businesswoman, and could be a powerful and fearsome adversary when she thought this was necessary. Yet, conversely, she was kind and loving, had an understanding heart, was generous to a fault, especially to her family, and the most loyal of women who was extremely fair.

Aside from its publishing success, A Woman of Substance was brilliantly brought to life on our television screens. Deborah Kerr played Emma as the older woman, Jenny Seagrove was Emma from her early youth to her mid-forties.

I will never forget seeing the film for the first time in our home, long before it had been aired. I started to cry, was filled with emotion when I saw Jenny in the role of Emma, tramping across the implacable Yorkshire moors, where she bumped into a young man called Blackie O'Neill, a character who flew so easily and swiftly from my pen, and was played by Liam Neeson in the film. These two were astounding in these roles, as were Deborah Kerr, and Barry Bostwick as Paul McGill, the great love of Emma's life.

I will never forget the marvelous performances given by Sir John Mills, Gayle Hunnicutt, Barry Morse, Nicola Pagett, and Miranda Richardson to name just a few other members of this extraordinary cast. And the most wonderful thing was that each actor looked exactly right, almost as I had imagined them in my mind's eye.

I was very proud when the six hour mini-series was nominated for an Emmy, and although it didn't win, it nevertheless had the word winner written all over it. It is still playing somewhere in the world as I write this, and the book is still selling in every country where I am published. Everyone tells me it's as fresh and beguiling as it ever was, and that Emma Harte is as much as woman of today in 2009 as she was in 1979.

No author who sits at a desk for hours at a time wants to write a book that nobody reads, and I am proud that my first novel has sold over thirty-one million copies worldwide. It is also on the list of the ten best-selling books of all time, up there with Gone With the Wind, and other famous classics. In fact, A Woman of Substance has become a classic itself, and I smile every time I see the phrase a woman of substance used to describe some other successful or unique woman. My title has gone into the language, and is used all the time, in newspapers and magazines, and on the airwaves.

I started writing when I was seven years old, encouraged by my mother who was a voracious reader. When I was ten, she found one of my stories and sent it to a children's magazine. Imagine my surprise and joy when they accepted it, and even paid me seven shillings and sixpence for it. But it was the by-line Barbara Taylor that impressed me, and I announced to

my mother that I was going to be a writer when I grew up. Many years later when I gave my mother a copy of the book she looked at me and said quietly, “This is the fulfillment of your childhood dream.” It was.

Of all the things that have happened to my first novel over the years, the one that has truly astonished me has been the desire on the part of my readers to have more books about Emma Harte and her family. To date A Woman of Substance has spawned five other novels, and a sixth, entitled Breaking The Rules, published along with this anniversary edition.

My husband Robert Bradford was the first person to hear the title Breaking The Rules, and he loved it immediately. Then he reminded me that this was what Emma had always done throughout her life...she had flaunted the rules and done it her way. And I can only say bravo to that.

Barbara Taylor Bradford

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