

A BID FOR A BRIDE

By BLANCHE EARDLEY

Author of "Kitty Bell—Actress," "The Lady Killer," Etc.
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CHAPTER I. The Acceptance.

Clifford Hawke's chambers were in a block of fashionable flats and chambers built at the end of a long thoroughfare, and just a stone's throw from Piccadilly circus. It was a late afternoon in summer, one of those delightfully balmy days in June when the atmosphere seems to quiver with a keen, throbbing desire for life, and even the very street noises take on a joyous note. The sinking sun was casting long golden shafts of light into the room, where the open window revealed great bowls of roses that filled the room with the scent of exquisite longings, their petals weary with the weight of their own loveliness.

The golden light and the roses, by far the most beautiful sight in the room full of beautiful things, stirred even the sluggish pulses of the man who sat in the recess by the open window, listening lazily to the muffled voice of the great human life below and about him. Clifford Hawke loved the voice of the ceaseless roar, for it sang to him now the mellow notes of success, and more than success, as it had in the early days of young manhood sung to him of the constant need of grit and pluck.

It had egged him on in those days to pit his roar against that of the crowds who were surging round him, and he had won—yes, on looking back on the slim, pale-faced, indomitable-eyed, strapping, with no influence and less capital, to the man he had made himself, rich, successful, feared in the city and courted in Mayfair—Clifford Hawke could now hear the note of triumph in the song that floated in through the open window.

Yet that same evening was to put the crown on Clifford Hawke's success and social glory, for at six o'clock he would be in his 40-horsepower Panhard, on his way to propose to the woman upon whom he had set the seal of his ambitious love. To be the husband of the only daughter of the managing director of the Amalgamated Copper Company, of which he was the secretary, at a salary of fifteen thousand a year, to say nothing of other outside speculations, would, to Clifford Hawke's ambition, be the crowning stone in the mosaic of his life.

For twenty years he had denied himself the dalliance that other men have with love. He had sternly held aloof from women, forging his way to the goal in view without so much as a backward glance at the temptations of the fleshpots of Egypt. And now his reward was at hand. All those years of hard self-repression was to be rewarded by a rich harvest that the good reaper might justly expect.

Presently he rose and gazed at a photograph in a silver frame on the

mantel. It was the latest that a fashionable lady photographer had taken of Stella Traine. He had cut it out of a society paper, and it was the only woman's face in the room. As he looked at it his deep-set eyes flashed with pride. "The loveliest face in London," he muttered, "and the whitest soul in the world! With you as my wife, Stella, my guiding star, every dark memory will be washed in the waters of Lethe." He bit his lip for a moment, then added firmly, "Yes, every dark memory that belongs to the past."

Half an hour later he was stepping into his dark red and white car that was shrieking and throbbing in the courtyard. As he paused to give an instruction to the chauffeur, who stood by the open door, the hall porter came hurriedly down the steps, a letter in his hand.

"A man left this some time ago, sir," he said apologetically. "I was not on duty then, but the other porter thought you were out and did not send it up."

Hawke looked at it carelessly. The writing was unfamiliar to him, and he thrust it into his pocket with a nod. He had something more urgent to think about than what was probably a begging letter, since the paper was poor and the writing shaky.

In ten minutes' time the car stopped outside a white house with a red awning over the balcony, that was hung with flaming scarlet geraniums. As he entered the white and gold drawing-room, Clifford Hawke realized for the first time the extreme nervous tension that had gripped him during the short journey from Piccadilly. He again felt as he did the day when years ago he had made his first attempt to bluff fortune into playing him a good turn. He had won then by sheer force of personality. Would that same force stand by him now? he wondered.

At that moment the door opened and a girl entered the room. A girl who looked with her exquisitely lovely face and corn-colored, simply dressed hair, the embodiment of an old world picture, yet whose tall, slender figure and graceful, self-possession showed that she had been brought up in an atmosphere of modernity.

As she went forward to greet him a slight flush stained her clear skin. The look in Clifford Hawke's dark eyes as he clasped her hand told her what she had begun to suspect was the reason of his desire to see her. Stella Traine was not vain, indeed, her nature was too sweet and natural for her to ever think much about the admiration that was poured at her feet. Men had made love to her, and always been met by the same frank, smiling, friendliness that had disarmed passion, and sent them away baffled yet hoping. But now for the first time in her twenty-one years the girl shrank from the words she saw trembling on the lips of the man who was her father's friend and right hand in all his undertakings. Ever since she had known him she had always looked upon the big man with the dark strenuous face as belonging to her father's time of life, and the sudden glimpse of the lover in his eyes startled her.

"I have only just returned from Lady St. Barbe's bazaar," she said lightly; "it was an awful crush, and so hot, you were wise to keep away." "I could go nowhere except to such places where work would keep me from thinking too much about something else," he replied. "I was in the city all day nearly, and got back in time to receive your note that told me I might come and see you."

She broke into a nervous little laugh. "Surely that can be no very rare event in your life! You see me so often, Mr. Hawke."

Clifford Hawke was no drawing-room man. He had never studied intricacies of parry and thrust in the West End, though he could indulge it in the city. And now that he had something to ask the beautiful girl beside him, he could not pretend to take a part in the conventional small talk that meant nothing to him.

"Miss Traine," he said, abruptly, "you must know why I want to see you."

She flushed warmly, and her grey eyes fell before him. But, woman-like, she took refuge in an evasive reply.

"How can I, Mr. Hawke? There are so many things we have discussed on which you might want to speak to me. Is it anything to do with the—"

She stopped abruptly as he snatched her hand in his, and the words tumbled from her lips as she realized that she was face to face with a passion that drove artifice before it like straws in the wind.

"Don't play with me," he said huskily. "I'm not the type to enjoy being kept in suspense by the woman I love, and I love you, Stella."

He went on, his voice trembling with the restraint he was putting upon himself. "I love you, dear, with the love of a man who has waited years for the one perfect love in his life. Won't you tell me, Stella, that you care a little in return? That I may hope to have my wife? I love you, dear, and have waited so long."

The hand that lay in his own neither fluttered nor tried to withdraw itself, but lay like a snowflake, cool and soft in his own burning fingers. And so it was with the heart that beat gently against the silk muslin gown she was wearing. Not a pulse of it stirred the faster, not a tremor quickened the blood that throbbed with each breath, and yet Stella Traine liked and respected her father's friend more than any man she knew. But his words of love left her unresponsive and still. Was this calm quiet what women felt towards the men who loved them? she wondered, or was she only surprised and frightened by the depth of the passion she had aroused?

"Stella, I am waiting, dear, don't

send me away miserable," Hawke said huskily. "I feel that if I lose you I shall lose my hope of salvation; you are everything to me, dear, the sum-total of all that makes life heaven or hell."

A faint color stained her cheeks. She was moved by his devotion, as an older, wiser woman would have been. The red wine of his passion began to tint the cool water of her crystal-like calm. Surely such love must be able to win love! she wondered.

"Mr. Hawke," she began slowly, "I don't know if I care in the way that I should like to care for my husband. I respect and honor you, but I feel that love—"

He laughed happily and drew her to him. "Dearest, I would rather teach you how to love than win the love that had been brought into life by another man. Only let me know that you will be mine and love will follow—with a woman like you it must, dearest, for such devotion as I have for you cannot go unrequited! You must—you shall love me in return!"

"And you are content with what I feel for you now?" she asked slowly. "The respect and honor that is yours already?"

"More than content," he answered her tenderly, "because from them I shall watch the birth of love, and when you are my wife, dearest—"

He paused a moment and she looked up at him in surprise. His face had grown cold and strangely pale, almost as though he had forgotten what he had been going to say.

"Are you ill?" she asked quickly. "Ill!" He broke into a sudden laugh that somehow jarred upon her already highly strung nerves. It was the laugh of a man who had thrust an unpleasant memory behind him. "No, dearest, I am never ill," he went on quietly; "how could I be when I know that I have won the most beautiful woman in the world for my wife?" and he drew her into his arms and kissed her hair, her eyes, her cold cheeks, and lastly the red lips that lay against his own hot ones like the petals of a rose the rain had lately washed.

"My darling," he murmured brokenly, "you will not keep me waiting long for my happiness? You will marry me soon?"

"When you wish," she answered, "only, please, Clifford," with a sudden swift glance into his face, "don't hurry me too much! You know I want to get accustomed to—to everything, and besides," she added in a different tone, "I must study father a little."

Her lover's brow contracted slightly. "Your father will be glad, I have told him of my feelings long ago."

"Yes," she murmured, "it will please him."

Before he left her he raised her slim white hands in his and kissed them. "You will be my wife, Stella, this day, darling. All my life I will devote to your happiness, and each joy I bring you may perhaps wipe out part of my debts in the Recording Angel's book."

"It is a very big debt!" she smiled. "It is a debt that I shall be glad to see wiped off," he replied gravely. "Only when I loved you did I realize what it was. I have not been a saint."

He went on, "but when I met you I knew for the first time that it was to wish to place a clean record before a woman."

(To be Continued.)

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LOCAL OPTION FINDING FAVOR

Important Recommendations by Anglican Synod Committee on Temperance.

Ottawa, Sept. 23.—The Anglican General Synod began its annual sessions here today. The delegates present include 110 clerical, 110 lay and 20 bishops, out of the 24 bishoprics in Canada. The Upper House, presided over by the primate, Archbishop Sweetman, of Toronto, is holding its sessions in the rectory of Christ Church Cathedral, while the Lower House, composed of some 220 delegates, half of which are laymen, and presided over by the prolocutor, Very Rev. J. C. Farthing, dean of Ontario, holds its sessions in the Lauder Hall.

Temperance Committee's Recommendations. The majority report of the committee on temperance observes that the Scotch act has worked out successfully in the Maritime Provinces, as has local option in Ontario and Quebec, and concludes as follows:

"In glancing over the several provinces of the Dominion, it is manifest that there is a great consensus of opinion concerning the bar, under our present licensing system, namely, that it is a public menace, and your committee would urge upon the synod that it is the duty of every man to further the effort to

Abolish the Bar. "Until such time as the bar is abolished your committee recommends: (a) That the license commissioners should be interviewed in every municipality and the request urged that windows should be uncurtained and all obstacles removed which would prevent persons seeing into the bar from the outside at all hours of sale; (b) that wherever it is not now the case, it should be made illegal for minors to enter a bar where intoxicants are sold; (c) that the principle of local option be extended to include the shortening of the hours of sale in those places where local option in its full meaning, has not yet been obtained; (d) that full advantage should be taken when practicable of the adoption of putting into force of local option under the present license law."

The report further says: "While enforcement of any system of control is difficult, yet when local option is in force the liquor traffic is growing up without the inducement of the bar and the changed sentiment in regard to the use of intoxicants in the family will prove immense factors in promoting temperance habits."

Treating Habit Condemned. "One of the greatest evils is the treating habit. To eradicate this should be the aim of every man. Your committee recognizes that there is a sentiment in favor of abolishing the bar and placing the residue of the traffic under Government ownership, to be sold in shops in small sealed packages to be consumed off the premises; they are of opinion that there would be greater safety if under Government ownership refreshment places were opened to a limited number, according to population, in cities and towns where intoxicants could be obtained by the glass, but where non-intoxicating liquors would be the chief feature. In such places the salesman or salesmen would receive no profit from the sale of the intoxicants, but in addition a fixed salary, would receive a commission on the sale of non-intoxicating drinks. Further restrictions could be placed on the sale of intoxicants, as there would be no inducement to the salesman to increase their sale."

"Under such a system as this the treating habit could be more easily dealt with, so also the sale to minors, persons who are unable to drink with moderation, etc., while the existence of such places would do away with the necessity of taking liquor home for consumption on the part of those desiring to use intoxicants."

Better Support Needed. "The committee asks for better support of the Church of England Temperance Society, and for the widening of the committee's and synod's scope and vision by incorporating with temperance the planks of the moral and social reform leagues, and calls for Canada's earnest co-operation in the suppression of opium use and importation."

This report is signed by Rev. C. L. Ingles, of Toronto.

Minority Report. The minority report of the temperance committee is signed by Dean Farthing of Kingston, but cannot agree with the recommendation that bars should be under Government control, but is of opinion that every man who desires liquor should be able legally to get it, that intoxicants should be sold in sealed packages, all sales being under strict Government control, but that

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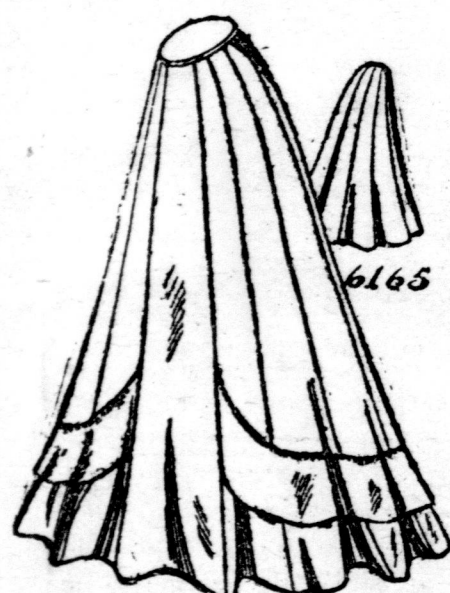
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