

# WHEN SANDERS WAS MY RIVAL

By Wilbertine Worden

"TS old Sanders that balls me up," I began.

"He is a very nice man," interrupted Elizabeth with dignity. "Besides, I wish you would not use slang."

"Oh, well, I don't like the way he ties his necktie," I replied crossly.

"You don't like him," said Elizabeth, "because he is agreeable, and you are not; because he is amiable, and you are bad-tempered; because—"

"Because he is wise and witty and clever and dignified and honorable and rich, and altogether the most intolerable old bore in the world," I interrupted savagely, and then I switched my walking stick so fiercely that I nearly broke it on the curb.

Elizabeth tilted her chin haughtily, and we did not say a word until we reached the fruit-stand of the old woman at the corner of Eighty-Sixth-st. Elizabeth stopped here. "I always buy peanuts for the squirrels," she said.

"And eat them yourself," I added. "I had walked in the New-York park with her before."

"Oh, well, peanuts are so sociable," said Elizabeth in such a conciliatory tone that I immediately felt what a hard-hearted, unsociable being I was.

We turned in at the park entrance there, taking the path going down toward the lake. The park and Elizabeth together meant a good deal to me—it was so seldom that I accomplished them both at the same time. Nature had made only one Elizabeth, and by careful calculation I had reached a miserable estimate of my place on a long list of men glad for an occasional opportunity to see her. I came about fifth.

"Still, it is the sensible list you are on," said Elizabeth, when I told her that I had discovered my place. "You see, I have been obliged to make out two lists, a 'sensible' one, and another one."

"Of course it is the 'sensible' one," I replied, looking her full in her wicked eyes. I knew better than to put myself in a place where she could begin any of her head-chopping. I always had to content myself with only looking at Elizabeth. And when the color of her hair and the curve of her cheek and the sweep of her eyelash went too strongly to my brain, it was time to tell her that I was merely gazing at her in an impersonal manner—and didn't she think she was losing her color a little? And then after that, I would go home and swear.

One has to do a little balancing, somehow. Elizabeth walked beside me with a long quick step. It is the way I like to see a girl go along. The park was so shrouded in green that it seemed mysterious and sweet, and I felt happy.

Elizabeth turned to me suddenly. "I have decided," she said, "to follow your advice."

"To follow my advice?" I exclaimed. "Good Heavens! Why do you do that?"

"But you gave it to me." "But I never intend that people shall take it. You embarrass me."

"But this advice was very good." "Look here," I said. "Why didn't you tell me that you were going to take it? I know of one particular piece of advice that I should have been only too glad to give you, and—"

She interrupted me. "Don't you remember what you said to me last Friday night?" she asked. "You were playing that waltz that you made up, and I did not like it, and we were talking all the time. We had two chairs drawn up to the piano. Don't you remember that waltz that I thought was so flat?"

Sometimes I think there is no necessity for Elizabeth being so frank. My friend Bartlett thought that waltz was fine. "Of course I remember what I said to you last Friday night," I answered calmly.

"Well?" said Elizabeth with suspicious eyes. "Was it about women?" I hazarded. I nearly always have found that to be a safe guess.

She laughed sardonically. "I will help you out," she said. "Don't you remember, I said I liked to put my head on my pillow every night and know that there was not a man in the whole wide world that could give me a headache?"

"I don't see how I could forget that," I answered. I straightened up my shoulders—I had my bearings. "And I said that there was something unnatural and unlovely about a woman who was not in love," I said firmly.

Elizabeth nodded her head.

"Well?" I repeated questioningly.

"Well," Elizabeth repeated after me. "I have decided to fall in love."

The leaves and the trees and the walks and the people mixed themselves up meaninglessly for a few minutes. It reminded me of the time I was heavily short of Union, and suddenly it jumped eight points—only this was worse.

"Why don't you ask me some questions," demanded Elizabeth, after what seemed to me a long time.

"I am going to," I replied quietly. "At least one, anyway. Who is the man?"

A smile passed over Elizabeth's face that coquetted with everything in the entire universe in her immediate neighborhood. "That is a long story," she answered.

"Suppose we go to our summer-house up in the woods this side of the lake and talk it over," I suggested. We were crossing the bridge by this time. A horrible thought came to me, and I knit my brows



"I Want to Be Saying 'Darling' All the Time, Darling"

in a black frown. Surely there were occasions in life where it was justifiable to kill! I caught her by the arm. "It isn't old Sanders, is it?" I cried.

"If you mean Mr. Sanders," corrected Elizabeth, "it is not, though I think he is a very nice man."

"He may have some good points," I conceded generously; "but when an old man with money comes—"

"He is not old," said Elizabeth decidedly. "Why, he walks up through the park every day, just for the walk. We may meet him."

"Charmed!" I murmured. We walked in silence, down steps and up again, past the bust of Schiller, then up the narrow, rocky, little path that always makes one think he is in the country. Our summer-house was deserted. There was no one in sight except

an occasional park workman. We sat down on the bench, and Elizabeth took off her gloves.

I put the peanuts out of her reach. "You cannot eat them and talk over a love affair at the same time," I said. "Now tell me all about it. Who is the man?" She leaned back, laughing. "There isn't any," she said.

One has to be patient with Elizabeth—she has had her own way so much.

"Who is the man?" I asked again quietly.

"Really," she frowned, "you go at things too directly. I tell you I am just in love. I have affections; but no object for them. The minute I have an object for them, I am a prisoner—caught, tied fast, bound. I feel loving, but I don't feel loving toward any one person."

I took two or three deep breaths. "This air is very good," I said. "Let me hold your hand a minute. How good it feels! No, don't take it away. I merely want to see what is the matter with you.

You are not in love, after all. It sounds to me more like measles or whooping cough. Let me look into your eyes, Elizabeth. I can tell better then." I leaned near to her and looked into those lovely, limpid bits of summer sky. "Don't you know, soulless child, that love is never anything more than a result—never anything less?—a feeling that must have as its inspiration one certain person?" Did I imagine, or did I really see a faint wavering in them—an uncertainty, a retreat?

"Let us talk and laugh," said Elizabeth crossly, taking her hand away.

I took off my hat and put it beside me, and then I took a peanut and shot it carefully with my thumb and forefinger at an imaginary target among the rocks.

"So, I am too direct, am I?" I asked.

"No," replied Elizabeth pettishly, "you are not. As a matter of fact, you are shifty. One never gets a real opinion out of you. Give me the peanuts."

I put them farther out of her reach. "Not yet," I said. I turned to her with a show of great earnestness. "Elizabeth," I said, "you took my advice; now give me yours, like a good girl. I need it."

"What is the matter?" she asked quickly. "The market?"

"No, the market is all right."

"Well, then, what is it?"

I rose abruptly, put my hands in the pockets of my coat, walked over to the opposite bench, and stared at the rocks for a few

minutes before I answered her. I really did this to give a park workman time to get out of the way, and the beggar was slow about it. Then I turned to her suddenly. "I am in love," I said shortly, and I took a swift look at her out of the corner of my eye.

Three things happened: the expression around her mouth changed; she took a short breath like a gasp; and then she broke into a dazzling smile. Good little Elizabeth!

"How nice!" she cried. "Who is she? Are you very much in love?"

I checked her questions with a wave of the hand. "I really would like to answer that last question," I replied. "It would be such a relief!"

"Then you have not told her yet?" said Elizabeth.

"I am going to very soon," I answered. "But, oh, Elizabeth, I am so much in love I am completely absorbed by it! Do let me tell you! In the first place, I think of her all the time. I think of her so much that I get impatient—a man really ought to have a little time to himself, you know. And curiously enough, if at any moment I should find that I had stopped thinking of her, I at once would make it my business to begin thinking of her again, so much do I want to; though, as a matter of fact, I have little to do with it, for morning, noon or night her face always is before my eyes, her voice always is in my ears."

"You must love her!" said Elizabeth in a tone so low I scarcely could hear it.

"Indeed I do," I replied fervently. "And lately it has taken such a queer form. I want to call her