

actually smiled, and made his way immediately toward Mrs. Norval.

Just then Mrs. Davernall touched me on the elbow with her fan. "Look at old Plutus!" she said. "You need not guess where he is going. He has found Elizabeth Malcolm."

Others around Mrs. Norval, seeing his approach, separated a bit. There, standing next to Eaton, was a slender figure, a radiantly handsome woman, simply gowned in black. After many years the face and the form had not changed from the likeness in which I had known them. It was my Lady Sunshine! I started when Mrs. Davernall spoke, quite oblivious of my rudeness.

"I suppose you have heard of our latest sensation?" she asked. "Well, if you have not, behold what we have called the Triple Entente."

I came back from the past at once. This was just what I had wanted to know. "Well," continued Mrs. Davernall, "in a way it is quite European. *Cherchez la femme!* Here is Elizabeth Malcolm, brilliant, charming, still youthful, who has our two biggest lions in leading strings. One you know is Plutus; the other is his rival and the coming man, Henry Eaton. You know they say that he is the only man of whom Plutus is afraid. Eaton is indeed a daredevil to fight, and there is no end to his ambition. He is a David, and he has his sling ready for Goliath. But here is the story:

"There is now a truce between them. Peace has evidently been declared, and the financial world breathes easier. It is a balance of power most admirably controlled by Elizabeth Malcolm. I hear that they both go to her and consult her on every business move they make. They have implicit trust in her judgment. However, there is no doubt that she plays one against the other, to the credit of our American modern Society. And—it can happen you know, cynics to the contrary—she has accomplished all this without giving rise to the least whisper of gossip or scandal. She is above all that."

It was remarkable, almost unbelievable! My faith in my Lady Sunshine, even although she had made one mistake when she married, was so strong that I readily accepted what would seem to Society generally as impossible.

The music was beginning. The company was being seated, and Mrs. Davernall and I went into the salon to take our places. We were obliged to pass before the group surrounding Mrs. Norval. Elizabeth looked up and recognized me. She extended both her hands, delighted to see me.

"My old sheepdog!" she cried. I was supposed to look after her at Zweibach. "This is a surprise! I want to see you and have a long talk with you. Can you come around to me tomorrow afternoon?"

THE lodge was a pretty cottage with a rose garden, a tiny lawn, and a toy stable. It was like a bit of old Versailles. It was just the setting for Elizabeth. In a moment we had bridged over the gulf of a decade. She had developed from the high-spirited, impetuous girl I had known, into the well-poised woman of the world. She was more bewitching than ever. I was not such a fool, after all, when I had christened her my Lady Sunshine.

We talked over old times, and she told me about her life, her present plans, her occupations, and her children. There were also charities,—not her own exactly: she was acting as almoner for the doles of Jacob Plutus and Henry Eaton. As she had thus alluded to these men, I was able to take up the subject and ask her about the Triple Entente.

"That silly story!" she answered laughingly. "Well, it is all this way: Henry Eaton, you know, is the Lord of the Isle down here. He is my near neighbor. I cannot begin to tell you what he has done for me. He loves to come over here and tell me all about his schemes. As for Mr. Plutus, I have seen a great deal of him since Mary Norval let me have the lodge. At first I was afraid of him. I think nearly everybody is: you cannot help it. He represents so much! The very thought of his power is appalling. He consults me too. He is much misjudged; but he is so self-centered that I would dread getting in his way—that is, opposing him. It is a constant struggle between supreme faith in his omnipotence and in his great heart. I really credit myself for talking him out of some of his ideas and for altering a few of his ironclad policies.

"Like all American men, these men have time for only two subjects when they talk to a woman. One is business, and the other is love. As the latter is impossible in any circumstances, they give all the more attention to finance. You see Plutus is domestic in his way; but at home there may often be lack of interest in his projects. Henry Eaton's family is keen on Society, and he wants someone to talk to him about more serious subjects. I am not an advanced woman; but I can help both of them, and moreover I can keep peace between them. It is great fun, and I am enjoying it all immensely. I do not profit by it, not even by a tip. That would destroy the charm. So we discuss, manage, and dispose of millions, and I am still as poor as the proverbial church mouse.

"Eaton loves hazard, and I have to check him when he wants to plunge into imprudent ventures.

"I revel in the bigness of everything they do. They juggle with railroads, steamships, and banks as if these were toys. Mr. Plutus represents the aristocracy of money. He has position by heritage. Someone has said that he is all things to all men; while Eaton is everything to every man—and that in its best sense. You see Eaton has won his way by his wonderful knowledge of men and the friends he has made. He has fought for every inch. I admire his bravery, and I always have liked a fighting man. Sometimes I pit one of these men against the other. Then there is a scrimmage, and I have a hard time to keep order."

It was as if my Lady Sunshine were telling me a fairy tale. It was all fascinating; but it looked to me as if she were playing with fire. It was all well as it stood. But if—

I SAW my Lady Sunshine frequently in the years that followed. I renewed an old friendship with Eaton, and I came to know and actually appreciate Plutus. I was in a way a third party, and perhaps I was also useful in maintaining the balance of power.

The situation was more than interesting. It would have been a congenial theme to a French novelist or dramatist, if either could have understood the American temperament. It was the inevitable triangle in which they revel; but minus the Gallic salt. To me it even lacked a note of sincerity. It was theatrical.

Elizabeth Malcolm was clever. In the hard school of life in which she had been trained she was taught to make the most of her chances. Even when she blundered she was sufficiently adroit to cover up her mistake. Beneath the surface she was ambitious. The immense power of Jacob Plutus dazzled her, and she could value the prestige his friendship gave her. She always held a certain superstitious fear of him. This dread specter was one largely of her own creation. But she must have known that she was necessary to Plutus. He had learned to look for her counsel and companionship, and as long as there were no trespassers she had no cause to fear.

Here was Henry Eaton, generous and fascinating, with his star in the ascendant, with every attribute a woman loves, a champion upon whose strength she could depend. The saving clause was that Elizabeth was a good woman.

It is absurd to try to whitewash men. Neither of these was immoral; but one must consider the world in which they lived. The plutocrat is a very Zeus, and Society will condone Danaë if she can, within the *convenances*, evoke the shower of gold. Both were cloyed, weary, and disgusted with the women who threw themselves at their feet. This woman was unattainable, and each knew in his heart that it would only be a kind or an untoward fate that would give him the prize or keep it from him forever. So far there was the absolute safety of neutrality. It was ideal.

THE Triple Entente continued to amuse and edify Society for some years. Then the unexpected happened. Tragedy stepped in under the mask of Death, and Henry Eaton suffered a family bereavement in the loss of his wife. He was a man to respect the conventions. During the period of mourning he went abroad. On his return he found that Elizabeth had gone to some obscure corner of England on a visit to a sister of Malcolm's.

Some years passed before my Lady Sunshine came back to her cottage on Long Island. Both men made a ruse at resuming the old association; but the situation had altered and their Arcadia was no more. Eaton was now free, and he could ask Elizabeth to marry him. No one realized this more keenly than Jacob Plutus.

SAINT VALENTINE

Ora pro Nobis

When old Saint Valentine was young—

Oh, say, do you suppose

That bashfully he held his tongue

And blushed like any rose?

And do you think he loved a girl

As dear as one I know?

And was he in a constant whirl

Afraid to tell her so?

Do you suppose he wished to say

The things I'm thinking now?

And—oh, to what saint did he pray

So that he might learn how?

Before Saint Valentine was old

Whatever did he do?

I wish I knew, then I'd be bold

And say the same to you!

—Anna Bird Stewart

Neither man could be received on the same terms. Plutus sulked. He was not in the running.

The romance of Elizabeth's girlhood was dead and buried. She was still young and beautiful, and of suitors she had a score. Life was before her. Eaton was a royal wooer. She was the envy of every woman. She had found her Sir Galahad, and quietly on one summer day she and Henry Eaton were married.

Society gave her a warm welcome. A scepter and throne were awaiting her. Her husband lavished money on her. He built a great town house, there was the country estate, there were villas in the South, shooting lodges in the North, a castle and moor in Scotland, yachts, and a Newport establishment. Her jewels were gorgeous. My Lady was at last in her environment.

It seemed that all their world was satisfied—all except one, and he the most powerful man in it.

What would Jacob Plutus do?

When he surmised the *dénouement* he withdrew to Europe. Even then he would not believe that it could happen. Eaton's wooing was open, and naturally he did not for a moment consider what Plutus might think. It never occurred to him that if the other had been free, he could have looked upon him in the light of a rival. But Plutus saw otherwise. Not only his vanity but some deeper feeling as well was so fearfully wounded that he would never accept the affront put on him. I was sure that he would have his revenge, and that it would be terrible.

So depressed was I over the danger that threatened—for I knew that it was real—that I could scarcely contain myself. I knew much about the methods of the man, and although I had tried to laugh my Lady out of her fear yet I had never undervalued his power. There was no limit to it, to his anger, and to his lust for revenge. He would scorn to wreak his vengeance on her; but I did not want to see my Lady Sunshine crushed through her husband.

In desperation I went to her and gave her warning. But this was only when, through many secret sources, I had heard the beginning of rumors that Eaton had been plunging unwisely. I knew what that meant. Stories like this travel like wildfire in Wall Street.

I FOUND my Lady Sunshine changed. She was calm and composed. She listened to my alarm quietly for awhile, and then with a curious light in her eyes she interrupted me.

"This is a man's business," she said, "and a woman has no place in a man's fight. If the worst comes to the worst, perhaps— Until then—"

She stopped short, and I knew it was in her mind that Eaton should measure his strength with that of the Master Mind of Finance, the most powerful private citizen in America. Her knight was in the lists! She feared no foe!

When I saw Eaton the same day I knew he realized the danger that threatened him. It was written on his face. That night I dined with them. At the end of the dinner Eaton explained that he would have to neglect his wife for a few days because of urgent business matters. She asked no explanation, nor did he volunteer any; although at that moment he was facing ruin for himself. There was no financial danger for my Lady Sunshine. His wedding gift to her had safeguarded that,—a fortune in gilt-edged bonds.

Henry Eaton went forth to engage in one of the deadliest and most dramatic duels in the history of finance. The story of it has never been told. There is much of it, even, that I did not learn about until long afterward.

It was a year memorable for its financial disasters, which verged on a panic, and because of his many enterprises in railroads and trolley companies and big industrial concerns, Eaton was vulnerable. He was a large borrower.

The attack came from many sides. The validity of franchises was assailed, mysterious interests were seeking control of his railroads, others of his stocks were raided in the market. And all the while the rumors were poisoning his credit. Loans were called. All the machinery of high finance was set in motion against him.

If he had gone into the open and made a fight, I doubt if he could have stemmed the current of disaster. But he did not even do that. He was in his office eighteen hours a day; but so far as Wall Street knew there was no fight in him. And we all knew that this was not like Henry Eaton.

Through one of my many sources of information I learned that the lightning was about to strike. I hurried to Elizabeth and told her the truth. Her husband needed millions, and not a bank in New York would lend him a dollar.

When Eaton came home to dinner—this he always did, even when things were at their worst—my Lady offered him the bonds he had given her. He refused with a single word. There was a finality in that "no" that forbade any discussion.

"Are you going to—" she could not finish the question.

"I don't know," he answered frankly. "Tomorrow will decide. It all rests with one man."

The next day everybody in the know in Wall Street

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