

LITERARY LADY

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Elizabeth Marbury died of heart failure early on a Sunday morning, January 22, 1933 at her New York home at 13 Sutton Square. The housekeeper called her Sutton Place neighbor and close friend Anne Morgan, the daughter of J. P. Morgan. By 9 o'clock, every New York radio station carried the news of Elizabeth Marbury's death, repeating it every hour on the hour for the balance of the day.

By noon, the first wires of condolence began to pour in. One of the first was from Warm Springs, Georgia where the newly elected and yet to be inaugurated president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, wired condolences, regretting he was unable to come north for the funeral, and said Mrs. Roosevelt would be accompanied at the service by their son, James.

Miss Marbury's close friends, Anne Vanderbilt and Anne Morgan made the funeral arrangements. Cardinal Hayes called to say that he had asked Monsignor Lavelle, rector of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, to celebrate a special mass on Monday at 8 AM.

The funeral was set for Tuesday morning, January 24th, which allowed travel time for those attending. It would take place in St. Patrick's Cathedral, becoming a civic event of national importance. Mrs. Vanderbilt called Betsy's closest friend and co-resident at 13 Sutton Square—Elsie de Wolfe. She suggested they postpone the service so that Elsie could return from Paris. Elsie declined. It was not her finest hour.

On Tuesday, Father Graham led a private prayer ceremony at 8 AM for close friends of Bessy Marbury in the second floor library where she had spent much of her time, a room with a beautiful view across the garden and of a giant oak tree with its rope swing and dominant vista of the rapidly flowing East River adjoining the property. The FDR Drive had yet to be built and the lawn must have been a delightful walk down to the bank of the East River.

The service was for a very small group—Eleanor Roosevelt, Grover Whelan, the novelist Fanny Hurst, Anne Morgan, Anne Vanderbilt, Alice Kuswetter (Bessy's longtime personal maid and companion), and Father Graham—some kneeling, some sitting but all subdued as they stared at the large closed casket which was necessary to accommodate Bessy's girth.

When the entourage moved downstairs after the private service, the weight and size of the casket made it difficult to maneuver down the circular staircase. The house was 16 feet wide by 65 feet deep with tall ceilings in the 4-story townhouse. I lived at #13 Sutton Place in the 1960s and 70s. There were still signs of the marred plaster from the wide casket, which brushed the staircase walls.

Upon opening the red front door, the pallbearers could see that the police had cordoned off Sutton Place from 59th Street to 57th Street. The line of march would go up 57th Street to 5th Avenue and then south to St. Patrick's cathedral. It was estimated that 20,000 people lined that route. Most of the viewers

knew Elizabeth Marbury, not as literary agent or as a democratic leader, but as the lady who championed for their local parks, better housing, and better working conditions for women.

Bessy worked with Eleanor Roosevelt to have the first plank in the Democratic Platform providing rights for women. This work was defeated in the 1924 Convention as the democrats were then still beholden to the "Solid South." The need for better working conditions for women was brought home when 147 women were burned to death because of the locked doors in a garment factory—locked to prevent the stealing of a shirtwaist. Bessy, Mrs. Morgan, and Mrs. Vanderbilt also pioneered hot food at cafeterias at government institutions such as the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In short, Bessy awakened a dormant social conscience.

The line of march to St. Patrick's was protected by 50 mounted policemen in addition to the 12 motorcycle officers who preceded the hearse. Then the marchers carrying flags of every democratic precinct in the city of New York followed. After the hearse came three open touring cars full of flowers. The procession included 20 limousines, the first bearing Governor Lehman, Mayor O'Brien, and Al Smith, the democratic standard bearer in the 1928 election. He was one of only 2 people, including Miss Marbury, to have a lifetime pass as a delegate to Democratic National Conventions—the first Super Delegates.

In addition to the Governor of New York, the procession included democratic governors from Massachusetts, Maine, Virginia, Rhode Island, and Maryland. They were followed by the mayors of Jersey City and Chicago. Additional limousines carried the publisher Conde Nast, the author Henry van Loon, the Daniel Frohman, and Noel Coward. They were followed by the entire Tammany Hall hierarchy. When the procession arrived at St. Patrick's Cathedral, both sides of the entrance were flanked by the honorary pallbearers in top hats, spats, wing collars, cutaways, and morning trousers. The sense of loss was much greater there than anywhere else because these were the authors whose fortunes Miss Marbury had made. George Bernard Shaw once remarked, "I vowed never to have a bank account but she force me to open one." A few of the additional names that she represented were examples of her successful career as an agent: Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, W. Somerset Maugham, Edith Wharton, Alexander Dumas, Theodore Dresser, and Eugene O'Neil. While the authors were reflecting on their financial loss, the cousins couldn't believe that this funeral was for their aunt, who they had drastically underestimated.

Elizabeth Marbury was born in New York to a socially acceptable family, but her father had no capital and only a modest income from his law practice. Those of you who are lawyers recognize the name Marbury as one of the first of the Supreme Court cases that defined the role of our institutions—"Marbury vs. Madison." Like many other ladies born into New York society in the Victorian era when they had no access to the job market, Bessy was forced to invent a new profession.

Overweight, over 30, and with no capital meant few marriage prospects for Bessy. Bessy believed

that ladies should not have to marry to have the finer things in life; they could have careers that would not only give them independence, but substantial money. She created a profession of theatrical agent for herself. Betsy had an advantage. Her father Francis took her to England each summer, where she met her father's friends who included Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer and John Tyndall.

Prior to Elizabeth Marbury, there was no U.S. opportunity for European authors like Shaw and Oscar Wilde to enjoy fair royalties for their plays. She set up a system of monitoring the box office receipts and, according to George Bernard Shaw, invented 10% for the authors.

The end of the 19th century was the era of the theater—no movies, no television, and no radio. The theater was the entertainment vehicle. Betsy also maintained that the theater was an educational vehicle.

Betsy had been an amateur playwright in the social set, which was limited to putting on plays for church socials. At that time, no one in society was permitted to go on the stage professionally. Victorian conduct in N. Y. City was more like the conduct of the court under Louis XIV. Her influence was not merely as a negotiator of contracts with the producers, but the ability to recommend and obtain the best star of the time. One of her closest friends was Sarah Bernhardt. Betsy also knew how to adjust foreign plays for the American audience. For example, the English hit "Thermidor" was the story of the dilemma of a man who had both a wife and a mistress. Betsy felt the American market would not tolerate a mistress and so converted the mistress to a second wife, which made possible the play's American popularity. Society in the 1890s spent much of their time in Europe and the best plays of English and French theater were brought back here *by* Betsy.

Women had to find a niche where they could have a profession in society that was indeed rewarding. She preached this philosophy to her good friend Elsie de Wolfe, an aging actress who wore clothes beautifully but Elsie's years were numbered. She took advantage of her good taste, becoming the first female society decorator, a profession previously dominated by male architects. Elsie's new career was greatly aided by Harry Thaw's shooting of the architect, Stanford White, at the Madison Square Roof Garden, creating the social scandal of the century. Stanford White's death allowed Elsie to complete the Colony Club by herself.

Wolfe is best known for introducing chintz and abolishing the old hand-me-down Victorian furniture that dominated New York residences. Thirteen Sutton Place is one of twelve townhouses on Sutton Square that in 1921 were remodeled by Messrs. Vanderbilt and Morgan. The architect was Mott Schmidt who was hired to completely restore and oversee all these old French flats, a term that meant a home where every bedroom had its own private bath.

Until they bought Sutton Place, the neighborhood was a bohemian slum. It was the site of Jacob Ruppert's Brewery, the power plant, the packinghouses, and the old coal yards on the river bank. It was then known as Yorkville, a term of derision.

The house on 57th and Sutton dates back to Revolutionary times, when General Howe, the British

commander in North America lived there. In 1777, the plan was for him to march north, meet General Burgoyne and 8,000 British regulars near Saratoga, New York. They were then going to crush the Americans once and for all. Howe did not march, for reasons that are still unclear. The Americans won the Battle of Saratoga and the French then joined the war on our side. One explanation was that General Howe was snoring with Mrs. Loring, the wife of his quartermaster general.

Those 12 townhouses encircled a 2-acre common garden overlooking the East River. Mott Schmidt and later Stanford White swept away the high steps of the old brownstones and made the entrance from the street level. The result was a graceful Georgian townhouse. Vanderbilt had moved from 660 Fifth Avenue to purchase 1 Sutton Place, a house that wrapped around the 57th Street corner with windows on both sides. It was the most desirable house on the Square, now owned by Mrs. Heinz of pickle fame. The last time I saw Mrs. Heinz she was at the head table for a fundraiser to benefit the Royal Academy. The aged Anglican priest gave a long prayer thanking the Lord for his blessings. She was heard to say, "What was he thanking him for? I bought the tickets!"

The Secretary General of the United Nations, who was her next-door neighbor, asked Mrs. Heinz if she would have a ladies luncheon for Mr. Gorbachev. She did, and invited some of her girlfriends—Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Barbara Walters.

Number 13 was then a perfect example of the use of less furniture on a smaller scale with the chintzes and paneling. Anne Morgan bought the house next to Mrs. Vanderbilt, now occupied by the Secretary General of the United Nations. William K. Vanderbilt was best known for his "public be damned" response, but William K. Jr. outdid his father by "an enemy of his wife is a friend of mine." These houses were not just a departure from the 5th Avenue mansions of the 400, but had flair of both Schmidt and de Wolfe. This is evident in the use of brick on the first floor with mortar heavily laced with carbon black (a detail Elsie de Wolfe always included), French doors facing the river, and the use of old imported paneling in the dining room. In number 13, their individual bedrooms were separated and the servants occupied the fourth floor. Elsie paid much attention to detail, which gave #13 the only first floor powder room, which later insured me invitations to all large garden parties. Howard Morgan once asked how I knew I. M. Pei so well. I told him his daughter was planning a garden wedding.

Bessy and Elsie had a "Boston Marriage" that was then defined as two women living together, sharing expenses, entertainment, friends, and travel—that is, all except the bed. Number 13 had a common kitchen and dining room, but two separate living rooms and two separate bedrooms, each with its own bath.

Bessy was faced with ineffective copyright laws in the United States, laws that allowed others to copy a successful play without compensation. Bessy overcame this, setting up traveling companies that opened nation-wide simultaneously with a play in New York. At one time she had ten traveling companies of Oscar Wilde's play, "An Ideal Husband."

She preached to the actresses that it was the Box Office, not the Casting Couch that was the

greater aphrodisiac. Bessy, according to P. G. Woodhouse, was the inventor of the modern musical comedy. She made Jerome Kern the best-known composer, and discovered Cole Porter, producing his first musical.

It is unfortunate that their work for the benefit of women workers was a magnet to many women who came not to support the work of Anne Morgan, but to do away with capitalism. Obviously her father was J. P. Morgan, the epitome of capitalism and represented the Puritan conscience and the Episcopalian attitude toward sin. Society then had two basic tenets in the sanctity of property rights and the sanctity of Holy Trinity. The worst possible thing for Morgan was that his daughter married a Unitarian.

Bessy preached the doctrine that women did not need to break the glass ceiling but could develop their own new professions which would provide more income and a broader life than simply marriage. Adherents were not just Elsie de Wolfe but Elizabeth Arden, who installed duplicates of Bessy's Number 13 Red Door in hundreds of her locations around the world. The size of the cosmetic business was equally rewarding to Helena Rubinstein. The two had sold at over 2 billion annually in the first ten years.

Following those pioneers, Estee Lauder was able to convince women that they could delay wrinkles, and Coco Chanel became the most successful couturier. Bessy was not only the world's greatest play broker, but she was the first to license and market a client name—the dancers Irene and Vernon Castle.

White women of Society were not the only ones establishing new professions. Along with Helena Rubenstein, Elizabeth Arden, and Estee Lauder, came C. J. Walker, 35, black, and earning \$1.00 a day as an illiterate and uneducated washerwoman. She developed a talent for public speaking at church taking money for poor parishioners. She used her public speaking ability to sell shampoo. She was not a great success using goose fat and meat drippings until she had a dream. In that dream she saw a black man who told her to use the herbs her family had used in Africa. He said this will create a magic potion that will aid hair growth. From then on at church, at carnivals, and on tour she started every talk with, "I had a dream." She became the Oprah Winfrey of 1904, receiving a celebrity note in the paper when she came to town. She eventually had 20,000 salespeople going door to door in 70 major markets. This was before Avon called with the Bible, or Lydia Pinkham with her Tonic, or Mary Kay with her cosmetics.

It is a surprise for us that canned sales talk like "I had a dream" was not started at the National Cash Register Company in Dayton, OH, or later by Tom Watson at IBM, but by C. J. Walker.

World War One brought rallies for the sale of government bonds and Bessy became a leading voice in the women's movement. Her father was a Southerner and was accused of being a copperhead. She became a Democrat by inheritance, having grown up in a house where the Civil War was referred to as the War of Northern Aggression.

The partnership of Elsie de Wolfe and Betsy Marbury created a new society that Lloyd Morns described as creating a society in which wit, style, creative achievement, and an interest in the arts took precedence over wealth and family. He said they created a vogue for the most improbable of diversions.

Brilliant Talk. Both of these ladies had impeccable backgrounds where they could have ridden on family rather than accomplishment had they so chosen. The Sunday afternoon at home would always include some of the following: Henry Adam, Cecil Beaton, Emma Lazarus, Irene and Vernon Castle, Coco Chanel, Charlie Chaplin, Noel Coward, Charlie Fratima, Shaw, Mark Twain, Sarah Bernhardt, Elsie Bormonose, Oscar Wilde, as well as opera stars who were in town and musicians of note.

Elsie was not a suffragette like Beth Trudeau or Gloria Steinem. She was always feminine—no pants or leather jacket. The theater did not really miss Elsie and she was known for her clothes not her lines. Bessy would have agreed with Maureen Dowd that men were unnecessary.

Bessy and Elsie bought the Petite Trianon adjoining Versailles. There they guests included Prime Minister Asquith, who dropped over during a break from the Peace Conference of 1919. It could more accurately be called the Inter Allied Prize Distribution.

It was not surprising when the war broke out that Mrs. Vanderbilt devoted her wealth and energy to establishing a hospital located in Blerancourt, an old chateau, for soldiers who had been gassed. The ladies worked in the hospital at Blerancourt with horrible conditions and the stench that came from the skin of those men burned by the mustard gas. Elizabeth Marbury, along with Mrs. Vanderbilt and Anne Morgan, were truly activists not just in getting the votes for women but particularly Anne Morgan in changing the living and working conditions for women in New York City. They were the 4 women of the metropolis.

Bessy went to France at General Pershing's request to speak to the troops. Her message was one of admiration, love, and affection for what the men had accomplished. She wore a huge cape with the letters K and C on it, as she represented the Knights of Columbus. She was simply known as Mother Casey.

She became a key factor in American politics at a time when American women had only recently gotten the vote. Her voice became their voice.

If you look for a book on what I call the four women of the metropolis you will only find it under "lesbian." Like most generalizations, it is not quite that simple. Anne Vanderbilt had four children, buried two husbands, and divorced a third. In those days that just wasn't done. Elsie was Pierre Lollard's mistress, but found it too confining and later married Sir Charles Mandl. J. P. Morgan did not like the Sutton Square company his daughter kept. At Blerancourt one lady work tirelessly with the wounded soldiers. Her name was Ann Dyke and I often wonder if her name gave rise to the epithet.

At Bessy's funeral Monsignor Lavelle's homily was very clear to point out her many accomplishments, which were possible only because of her pragmatic approach to politics. She was always aware of the flaws of Tammany Hall, but she wanted change and change she accomplished. Bessy understood ward politics, the same way she had to change producers. She dropped her old friends the Fromans for the Shuberts, and dropped Al Smith the happy warrior for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. To paraphrase a French King, the Whitehouse was worth missing the mass.

Elizabeth Marbury's life always included the unexpected and her death was no different. After the candle lights in St. Patrick's had burned down and the mourners had left, Miss Marbury's casket was carried by the men from the funeral home to the waiting hearse in front and was then taken up 5th Avenue to the Woodlawn Cemetery in the suburbs. The unexpected was that Miss Marbury had made no provisions for her burial. Despite her claim that she had joined the Catholic Church, there was no evidence of her conversion or admission. Therefore, the hearse drove from the mass at St. Patrick's to the family's plot in the Protestant cemetery. She proved to be the audacious lady to the last.