

Elizabeth Surrenders

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bosom, like this?

ELIZABETH: You do that!—Or you're too fussy to be a 'dopted nevvy of mine.

NEVILLE (as he hurries out by the door on the left): Anything you say goes, Honey—Oh, here's your purse—in the fly-paper.

(Alec is patiently waiting to come in, as he listens with a smile to the hurried, low conversation in the studio. He is that adorable thing, a middle-aged man with the smile of a jolly boy. He is something of a dreamer, is Alec, absolutely devoid of conceit—though he is having his portrait painted by request of the City Club, of which he is President—so it never occurs to him to be impatient when he is kept waiting. Perhaps that is why the dear man lost Elizabeth. However, that is as it may be, and Elizabeth opens the door, and he walks in and shakes her hand gently but with a firm pressure—you know how men like Alec shake hands—there is courtliness and loyalty and warm friendship in such a handshake.)

ALEC: How do you do, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Late, as usual; your sitting was for three-thirty.

ALEC (blandly, and with a twinkle in his eye): I've been waiting in the hall for ages, waiting for you to open the door. Whose was the manly voice, and why did your visitor escape through the kitchenette? I scent a mystery!

ELIZABETH: Nothing mysterious about Neville. He's gone to the grocery store for half-a-pint of cream. When Kitty comes, you know, I'm going to give you tea.

(For some reason which we cannot fathom, Alec looks the picture of dismay, but as we, too, have plotted little plots and then feared the consequences, there is something familiar, somehow, in the emotion which his expressive face portrays. There is no doubt about it, Alec is dismayed, and he is concealing it badly.)

ALEC: Neville here? Dear me! Neville! Now what in the world is Neville doing here? Thought he was safely at College. Most unfortunate! Wouldn't have had this happen for the world!

ELIZABETH (tartly): Wouldn't have had what happen? Nev's coming? I thought you'd be delighted to see him! I wrote him, of course, about your engagement to Kitty, and he's coming down to congratulate you both—to, as it were, celebrate.

ALEC (weakly): My Fathers!

ELIZABETH: What?

ALEC: Nothing.

ELIZABETH: I thought I heard you speak.

ALEC: Not at all.

ELIZABETH: My mistake.

ALEC: Don't mention it.

ELIZABETH: I won't. . . . Of course, you told me to keep this engagement thing under my hat, as it were—but I knew you'd both want him to know, poor boy, and he's taking it most philosophically.

ALEC: Why "poor boy"?

ELIZABETH: Well, unless you're blind, you've seen how it is with Neville, his feeling for Kitty—but he'll get over it—they always do.

ALEC (too much perturbed to pay much attention to her words—only half-listening, in fact): Ah—dear me—just so—

ELIZABETH (meaningly): I say—"He'll get over it—they always do."

ALEC (hearing her remark for the first time): Not always, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: I said "always!"

ALEC (gently stubborn): And I said "not always," Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (with a world of sarcasm in her voice): For instance?

ALEC (long-repressed emotions stirring within him): Elizabeth—do you ever remember—do you ever think—

(Then, panic seizing him, he tries to cover his tracks.)

Do you remember the sad case of my Aunt Emily?

ELIZABETH: She was a woman—YOU—I mean Neville—is a man.

ALEC (weakly): You know best, Elizabeth. What—what time do you expect Kitty?

ELIZABETH: Almost any minute, and I haven't begun work yet. For goodness' sake, take the pose and stop talking. I've been trying to get some construction into the trousers this afternoon—hate painting trousers!

ALEC (seating himself in the chair on the platform): If Neville were in love with Kitty, why didn't he tell her so?

ELIZABETH: Why didn't he tell her so? What a question! He doesn't graduate till next June; added to which she has too much money, and he, not enough.—Don't move!

ALEC (gently): Kitty thinks the girl has a right to know.

ELIZABETH (snapping at him): Well, you told her—didn't you?

ALEC (uncomfortably): Oh, yes, yes, of course! I told her; didn't I?

ELIZABETH (grimly): You did!

ALEC: How did the boy take it, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH (in a detached manner, as she stands off and squints horribly at the picture): Take what?

ALEC: Kitty's—my—our—ahem—engagement?

ELIZABETH: Still harping on that subject? Oh, he'll get over it; they always do.

ALEC: Not always, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: ALWAYS!—Now, don't start that silly argument again; I won't have it!—How often have I told you that I can't paint if you persist in talking all the time?

ALEC (smiling): All right, Dear—dear Elizabeth. Pose and expression all right?

ELIZABETH: No! Nothing's right. Stop thinking of Kitty; it makes you look so foolish. I'm painting a picture of a business man, to be hung on the walls of a city club, not of a lover mooning about his lass.

ALEC (meekly): I wasn't thinking of Kitty, Elizabeth; I was thinking—just thinking—uh—

ELIZABETH (interrupting): Well, stop thinking if the effort makes you look like a fool. . . . Oh, yes. . . . I beg your pardon—I've no right to be so rude, I know—but you are unbelievably irritating, and I do want to get some work done and have some time to dress before Kitty comes.

ALEC (amazed): Have time to what?

ELIZABETH: D-r-e-double s—DRESS! YE Gods! Alec, does it seem so impossible?

ALEC: Not impossible—just improbable; you never do dress, you know, dear.

ELIZABETH: Don't be insulting—and don't call me "Dear." (She proceeds severely.) I have some new clothes, and I'm going to wear 'em—new dress and boots—yes, and a hat—I'm going to wear 'em out to dinner with Neville to-night—we're going to that new place around the corner—he needs cheering—

(Alec realizes with tender amusement that she is really feeling very apologetic for her womanly weakness; he can't resist teasing her a bit, in his gentle way.)

ALEC: "Cheering?" Yes, I can understand that; but you, in new dress and boots—not forgetting the hat—would be exhilarating—intoxicating—

ELIZABETH (crossly): Well, it's some satisfaction to know that you won't be affected that way. . . .

ALEC (with cheerful interest): Oh, I don't know! Why, I haven't seen you "dolled up," as Kitty would say, in years and years and years—

ELIZABETH (infuriated—and who can blame her?): AND YEARS—say it again, Alec—say it as often as you like!

(Alec subsides; he stiffens a little in the pose. Elizabeth works on, whistling that everlasting tuneless tune. Alec is wondering vaguely what will happen when Kitty and Neville meet. Now that he is face to face with the consequences of his foolish little plot, he is feeling an awful fool, and longing to confess the whole thing to Elizabeth before any more complications arise. He feels that his position is undignified; he feels rather desperate; he doesn't know if he's going to be roundly scolded or laughed at. We'd be distressed ourselves. Several times he opens his lips to speak, but closes them before a word has passed them.)

ELIZABETH: Your expression is impossible. All I ask is that you look normally intelligent, but, according to your expression, you are running the whole gamut of human emotions.

ALEC: Elizabeth—you say that Neville is here?

ELIZABETH: You heard me?

ALEC: And Kitty may be here at any moment?

ELIZABETH: What in the world is the matter? Do try to think about the weather for just five minutes.

ALEC (desperately): Elizabeth, what would you say if I told you that I had been a fool—let myself into a devil of a fix—a childish fix, but a devil of a fix for all that?

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