

# ELIZABETH SURRENDERS

## First of a Series of One-Act Plays

By CATHARINE ROBERTSON (Raggs)

**W**HEN the curtain rises, Elizabeth is seen in her studio. She is an artist, possessed of that artistic temperament which soars above cobwebs and dust, yet her painting garb—an all-over smock-like apron, which was once a glorious blue, but now has daubs of many-coloured paints upon it—shows unmistakable signs of having once seen service as a duster, so we must not judge her too harshly. Chaos reigns supreme in her person and her studio. Her curly, dark hair stands on end, except where it "wisps" behind; even her carpet slippers are floppy and faded; tortoise-shell spectacles are almost on the end of her nose—that could do with the application of a powder puff—so, to see more plainly, she tilts her chin in the air as she works. Canvases are reversed against the walls; the floor is bare; to the left is a small, square platform, on which is a vacant chair; on the right is an easel supporting a large canvas on which she is working.

Elizabeth is doing a little work on the trousers of the gentleman whose portrait is half-finished. We know that Elizabeth is enjoying herself vastly, for she is talking at the portrait, and the portrait, naturally, can't talk back. She is talking in a very emphatic manner; Elizabeth is nothing if not emphatic. We feel relieved that the original of the picture is not present to hear her; we don't hurt people's feelings ourselves, and we don't like to see it done.)

ELIZABETH: No, my friend—n-n-n-n- NO! Trousers were never meant to be immortalized! But, for the matter of that, neither was your funny face! The conceit of men! Now, no woman with such generous ears, high cheek-bones, and a tendency to baldness would ever sit for a portrait! O, you funny old dear! Never mind, though, your mouth is as nice as they make 'em, nothing manly and savage and brutal about it, like the mouths of most males, and your eyes are like the beautiful orbs of a faithful old hound—faithful—huh!

(There is something pathetically bitter in Elizabeth's "huh!")

But you're a faithful pal, Friend-Alec, even if, in the matter of—

(We feel that Elizabeth is on the point of letting cats out of bags, so we are rather annoyed that she is interrupted by a knock at the door, which is at the back of the studio, facing the audience. She goes to the door, and returns well laden with a dress box, a hat box, and a shoe box. She drops them all on the floor beside the easel, and whistles a tune that is no tune at all, as she retrieves the shoe box, undoes the knotted string with her teeth, and takes out a pair of bronze boots of fashionable slenderness. She ignores the portrait for the moment and talks to herself this time—a bad habit, acquired through living alone. We realize the pathos of this, withhold our criticism, and sympathetically contemplate her as she eyes the boots with a chuckle.)

ELIZABETH: The darlings! Stylish—but not gaudy! And such heels! Shades of the sandalled Greeks! Such heels! Those ought to catch his eye—bless 'em!

(She again addresses the portrait of Alec.)

Oh, I know you're thinking I'll never squeeze into 'em—but there is much virtue in a shoe-horn, my friend.

(She pauses, irresolute, looking from the portrait to the boots, and back again.)

I hate to waste precious daylight, but—I must try 'em on, the ducks!

(She kicks off a carpet slipper, which lands—anywhere—and, with much effort, squeezes into one of the boots. She chatters away to herself.)

You know, Elizabeth, you used to have rather nice, neat Trilbies, once upon a time. You're a wicked woman to spread your toes in carpet slippers. A sensible female, a womanly woman, never looks the monstrosities in the face until she takes to warming them before the fire for the worthy lord of her hearth and home. Oh, dear, why did the Good Lord create me a mad genius when he might so easily have made a soft, satisfied, restful creature, with a passion for high heels, silk stockings, peek-a-boo waists, and—babies?

There—that looks nice!

(She sits on the platform and elevates her two incongruous feet, the slipped one looking half as big again as the neatly-booted foot.)

Well, if the rest of the fine feathers make as great a difference, I certainly ought to be ravishing enough to DO THE TRICK. (She smiles at the portrait.)

What do you think, my dear?

(Another knock on the door upstage. For some reason, Elizabeth is momentarily petrified; then she starts unlacing that bronze boot as if her life depended upon having the carpet slipper upon its accustomed foot before another human sees her.)

ELIZABETH: Don't come in! Who is it?

NEVILLE (Outside. Quite cheerfully): It's only me, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (Ecstatically): Heaven be praised, you lamb child! Just a minute, and you can come in. I'm—uh—dressing.

NEVILLE (more cheerfully yet): Oh, rats! Honey, you know you sleep in your clothes!

ELIZABETH (Ruefully, to herself): I know they look it.

NEVILLE (Still on the wrong side of the door): Can I come in now?

Entered at Ottawa in accordance with the Copyright Act.

ELIZABETH (Shrieking): NO!

(She hops wildly about on one foot, looking for the carpet slipper; finds it; puts it on; gathers up her parcels; rushes out of the studio by a door at the left, calling to Neville as she does so.)

ELIZABETH: Now you may come in.

(So Neville comes in. He is a good sort, young, athletic, tall; what the vulgar would term "a looker." His age? Well, he's voted once, perhaps.



Catharine Robertson, author of "Pat, Peg and Another" in the May issue and the accompanying play in this.

He looks altogether too merry for a lad who hasn't a living relation; but then he and Elizabeth take a great satisfaction in their adopted relationship of aunt and nephew. He feels that she "belongs," and few nephews feel that way about their real aunts, I've been told.)

(Elizabeth having made the aforesaid hurried exit, Neville is surprised to find the studio empty.)

NEVILLE (Declining): "Gone! And I always loved that girl so well!" (Then, becoming prosaic):

Where the Dickens are you?

ELIZABETH (appearing at the door minus her bundles): Here I am.

(Elizabeth beams upon Neville as her carpet slippers carry her to him. She puts her hands on his shoulders and looks him in the eyes. We feel that this is a little ceremony that has been many times performed, when she speaks.)

How goes it, Boy?

NEVILLE (with an obvious carelessness): Oh, all serene.

(But Elizabeth isn't satisfied.)

ELIZABETH: How goes it, Boy?

NEVILLE: Honestly, Auntie—all serene—as can be expected—

ELIZABETH: Yes, Nev?

(Neville breaks away, strides to the portrait and faces it with arms folded as he speaks again, just the suspicion of a choke in his voice.)

NEVILLE: O, Auntie!—Auntie—does she really love the old duck?

ELIZABETH: Thinks she does—the silly little foo—

NEVILLE: Don't be blasphemous, Auntie!

ELIZABETH: You lamb!—My mistake!—But, on t'other hand, it approaches blasphemy to call Alec an "old duck"—yes?

### AMATEUR PRODUCERS!

READERS of EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD who are amateur producers who desire to use this play may do so without charge. Professionals are requested to note the copyright line and to communicate with Miss Robertson, c/o EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD for permission to produce the play.—The Editors.

NEVILLE: Does he love her?

ELIZABETH (pugnaciously): Not a particle!

NEVILLE (in an irritated tone of voice): Then why—in the name of common sense—

ELIZABETH (pityingly): Oh, the poor innocent thinks that he loves her with a romantic devotion!

NEVILLE: That's like a lot of people—don't

know the difference between being in love and imagining that they are.

ELIZABETH: Yes, and some of us persuade ourselves that it's all imagination, when it's the real thing. Funny—isn't it?

NEVILLE: Is their engagement announced yet?

ELIZABETH: Only to me. I thought that you ought to know—might be interested—huh!—so I dropped you that line to tell you the joyous news. (But from the quality of Elizabeth's voice when she says "joyous," you know that she really means "tragically idiotic.")

NEVILLE (conversationally): I always thought he was still soft on you, Auntie.

ELIZABETH (hypocritically): What an idea! Such a thought hasn't entered his head, or mine, for the past nine years.

NEVILLE (rather diffidently, for him): You were engaged to Alec, then?

ELIZABETH: Like a silly young fool!—I notice you don't say that's blasphemy?

NEVILLE: Ha!—Why did you break it off, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Didn't care enough to give up Paris—my work—artistic atmosphere—Bohemianism—all such piffle—and SETTLE DOWN! That phrase has done more to wreck young lives than any other in the English language. What human being with youth and all life to live, wants to "SETTLE DOWN?"

NEVILLE: And he's never spoken since, Dear?

ELIZABETH (quietly): I told him, in good set terms, what a small footling thing he was offering me, in comparison with my art, with my future, with fame—bright, golden fame.

(She indicates the cheerless, untidy studio in a comprehensive, weary gesture that somehow bespeaks all the desolation of heart, of which it is a symbol.)

No, Nev, ole son, he hasn't spoken since!

(She smiles a crooked, pathetic little smile that has much of humility in it.)

NEVILLE (reflecting her mood and speaking with a sad enthusiasm): And to think that, now, he's in love with his own ward—a mere kid—all of fifteen years his junior—the most beautiful, exquisite, alluring little darling girl that ever—

ELIZABETH (dryly): Yes; tastes change; don't they, Nev?

NEVILLE (all contrition): Darlin' 'dopted Auntie Betsy—you know I didn't mean that.

ELIZABETH: But what beastly luck that the dear old reprobate should fall in love with your best girl!

NEVILLE (emphatically): Confound him!

ELIZABETH (sotto voce): Confound her!

(When Elizabeth finds herself growing emotional, she invariably and sternly curbs those emotions of hers, and, as we all know, the only way to do this thing is to think hard, instead of feeling. So she sets her wits to work.)

Now, listen to me, Neville. We've got to face this situation and see what can be done. For your sake, I'm willing to go to any lengths to shatter their dream of wedded bliss—for it's only a dream, from which they would awaken with an awful jolt when they were once married—for your sake—

NEVILLE: O Elizabeth, you don't think it's too late, then?

ELIZABETH (with a cheerfulness that is perhaps a bit too obvious to be convincing): Of course not, you silly boy! This thing just simply isn't going to happen—that's all—I—your adopted maiden aunt—do hereby declare that I just naturally won't have it! I—I—I will not have two young lives laid waste—two young hearts broken when they are just—as it were—learning to beat—I WILL NOT—

NEVILLE (only his sense of humour saving him from tears of self-pity): Why, Auntie—you're eloquent—positively eloquent!

ELIZABETH (with a more sincere emotion than that inspiring her previous speech): And I'll be switched if Alec's going to make a fool of himself at his time of life! He'll marry her over my dead body—my—my quivering corpse! The idea! ALEC!—And that blonde, blue-eyed little pin-head! There—I've said it—and I mean it! Be jabbers!!!

NEVILLE (bewildered): Why, Honey, you sound as if you were positively jealous—

ELIZABETH (indignantly): I'm not—I deny it!—But—

(There is a knock at the door up-stage.)

Jimminy Christmas! There's one of them now, and I've promised them tea, and there isn't a smitch of cream in the house.

NEVILLE: Give 'em lemon—

ELIZABETH: No, Alec—I mean Kitty—prefers cream. Run out to the grocery store, like a dear lamb—back way—this door—half-a-pint—and take these two bottles.

(She thrusts upon him two small empty cream bottles, which she retrieves from a small table littered with papers and prints and sketches.)

They allow you five cents on each bottle. You'll find my purse somewhere in the kitchenette.

(She puts his hat on his head at a rakish angle.)

I like your new hat, Nev.

NEVILLE (beaming): It IS a sporty lid.

ELIZABETH: But you shouldn't buy a new hat just because you're in love; the girl may not like it, and you'll have to wear it out, anyway. Now rush—you can make it in five minutes.

NEVILLE: Do I carry the bottles through the street, clasped to my manly

(Continued on page 32)