

Elspeth, flushed, tense, sparkling laughed in her mother's face. "Old Slowey-pokey" she called the woman who was doing a man's work in the world.

"Thrills and ripples, muzzie! That's all that's worth while in life. When the bubbles go, then what's left is stale and dull."

Yet the coming of young Holloway had wrought in a few days that change in Elspeth that all her mother's admonitions had failed to effect. All of a sudden, Elspeth had turned strangely still and sober. And with this subtle change in the girl's nature, the whole course of life in the business woman's house somehow altered also.

No longer Mrs. Maitland returned to a house shaking with music and mirth, with every light going brightly. Now the lights were always dim, or more often than not, the place was dark. No longer Elspeth burst from that bright bouquet of young friends surrounding her, and fell upon her mother with extravagant expressions of welcome, with kisses and cajolery. A new Elspeth came out of dim corners of the room, and followed by Hal Holloway, greeted her mother with the intensest seriousness and with unwonted tenderness and emotion.

Elspeth's confidence had always been reluctantly given to her mother. She was of that type of girl, who hesitate to confide the serious matters of life to their own mothers, but pour them in a flood into the sympathetic and appreciative ear of an exclaiming and understanding friend sworn to deadly secrecy by the symbol of crossing a neck and crossing a heart and hoping she "might die if I tell." However, she was so impulsive and transparent, that her mother knew she was incapable of holding a secret for long, and sooner or later it would be "let out".

Mrs. Maitland waited a week to learn something about her daughter's latest friend, he who had "cut out" all of her boy and girl friends, and who had the effect upon the spirits of the girl of what a resentful friend termed a "dampener". But if Elspeth's laughter and gay chatter no longer filled the house, nor the rush of her flying feet was heard, there was a light in her eyes that had a poignant beauty all of its own. If love does not make life joyful; if bliss is illusory, at least it gilds and transforms one's life with an exquisite touch of artistry that is hard to analyse.

THAT night, Elspeth had come slowly up to bed and in the dark undressed and got in silently beside her mother. For a long time that silence that does not always mean sleep reigned in the room, and then the mother discovered that her daughter was trying to

smother her sobs in her pillow.

"Ellie, are you awake?"

Silence—Ellie frantically trying to control her voice. After a moment:

"No. What d'you want?"

"I just wanted to talk to you about this—er—young Holloway. Who is he, dear?"

A stiffening of the young creature beside her in bed, and then a little gasping cry, like a child's. Ellie and Hal Holloway had had their first "lover's quarrel", but not for worlds would she have admitted this to her mother, though, in fact, the quarrel had, in a way, been on her mother's account, for Ellie had refused nobly, as she believed, to listen to the pleading proposals of the boy who passionately had begged her to leave her mother and fare forth with him into the wonderful world that he pictured to her was without.

Mrs. Maitland leaned across, put her arms about her child and waited. After a while a muffled voice said:

"Muzzie, do go to sleep. Don't bother 'bout me. I I—j-j-just g-got a t-too—tooth-ache."

"Who is this young Holloway?" persisted her mother.

"Oh he's just—just Hal Holloway that's all. I don't want to talk about him."

Ellie's voice had an edge of rising irritation. After the sacrifice she had made on her mother's account, she felt that it was a shame to be repaid in this way.

"Why does he come here so often? You are too young. . . ."

"Now don't begin that. . . ."

"Well, but I must. I should like to know what he has said or done to make you change so. You are not yourself at all. I never saw such a change in a girl."

"I'm just the same as I always was, and I wish to goodness you'd stop quizzing me like this."

"Ellie", said her mother patiently, "you are really nothing but a little girl, when all's said and done, and if I were you I'd hold on to my youth as long as I could. You'll be a long time old, and such a little while young. You don't know how precious youth is. Do hold to it, darling, as long as you can."

"Do pity's sake don't start preaching at this hour of the night."

"I'm not preaching, dear. I just want you to understand. Now, I don't want you to tell stories about your age. I heard you to-night. You told Mr. Holloway you were going on to nineteen."

"So I am!" came swiftly from Elspeth.

"Yes, going on—three years off," said her mother dryly.

