

THE QUILL

THE CANADIAN SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ALEXANDER CIGAR STORE
& NEWS STAND
204 8th AVENUE W.
Phone MI312
CALGARY, ALTA.

January

1 9 2 3

Price 25 cents

New Year

Number

Elspeth

By ONOTO WATANNA

The "flapper" may be passing, but girls like sixteen-year-old Elspeth are peculiar to no particular period. This is a good story and a delightful character study by a famous Canadian Author.



ELSPETH was sixteen years old. She was pretty and temperamental, or, as an unkind friend once described her, "temperish". Her mother was exactly eighteen years older than Elspeth, and that fact the girl seized upon to "rub in" when the other woman attempted to prohibit the early association with youthful members of the opposite sex.

"You're a nice one to preach," cried Elspeth, her eyes dancing. "You must have had beaux when you were in short skirts. How old was father when you married him?"

"Your father was twenty-one," replied Mrs. Maitland, very rosy and flustered.

"Ah—ha! Well, one of you was of age anyway. That's enough, isn't it?" She added the last question with a certain artlessness that nevertheless perturbed her mother.

"But Ellie, dear, I wouldn't want you to make the mistake I did."

"Mistake!" Instantly Elspeth was on the warm defensive.

"Are you trying to say that your marriage to my father was a mistake then?" she demanded indignantly.

"Yes, it was a mistake, Ellie," affirmed her mother quietly, "for we were nothing but children, and I believe things might have been very different for your father. . . And then his people might not. . ."

"His people, uh?"

Elspeth seized the opportunity to demand information concerning "my father's people."

"Who were they, anyway? And why don't I know them? And where do they live? And why don't they like you mother? How is it you never talk about them?"

"Why, they are just ordinary people, Ellie. You don't know them because they live a great distance from here—in the east, and as for their liking or not liking me. . ."

She hesitated, bit her lip and turned from her daughter. Instantly Elspeth sprang to her, excited, thrilled, and convinced that her "hunch" about her father and his people was correct. He had married beneath him! That

was it. No doubt, he came of an illustrious and very wealthy family, while her mother. . . well, Elspeth's mother, as she once herself quaintly expressed it, had always been "Saturday's Child", who must work for her living.

"Mother, tell me the truth at once. You've kept it so long from me. Isn't there a great romance in your life about you and my dear dead father? Weren't his people multi-millionaires, or swells of some kind? Did they object to his marrying beneath him? Don't be hurt, muzzie. For my part I admire working girls, and if it was't for other plans already made, I might be one myself some day. But do tell me. . ."

"Ellie, you foolish child, if you must know, your father's father was a plumber. My father was a college professor". . .

"Oh-h-h!"

Ellie had turned pale. She was hard hit. Her eyes looked luminous and very large, as she took in this intensely humiliating information concerning her antecedents. Her pride was in the dust, and all of her fine castles tumbling about her. She felt that she never could adjust herself to the thought of being a plumber's grandchild. After a long and painful silence, she said resentfully:

"Then I don't see why they objected to his marrying you."

"I never said that they did. You've been imagining things."

"Well, but they never speak to you."

"Yes, they do, when we see each other, but the years and distance are great separators, Ellie."

"And didn't you even elope then?"

"Now, Ellie, that's a foolish question. We came out here like a couple of foolish children to avoid the objections which our parents naturally were raising to our marriage on account of our extreme youth."

"Anyway", said Ellie triumphantly, "you did elope. You can't get away from that."

Mrs. Maitland sighed, and Elspeth, her attention already diverted by a group of



young people passing the house added hastily: "Poor old muzzie! Well, you should worry!" Then screamed to the passing girl without:

"Hi-yi, Dot! Wait for me, will you!" She was out of the house in a flash, and arms linked with her friend's was waltzing down the street to the strains of a whistled melody, which came from the background of youths who loitered, simpering, behind the girls.

Mrs. Maitland, looking after the dancing young figure disappearing down the pretty tree-ed street again sighed.

IT was no easy matter to govern the head-strong passionate young creature that fate had confided to her care, and whom she was obliged to leave all of the week days. Ellie's wants grew like an ever rolling snow ball, and there were so many things she was obliged to ban, for the girl's own good, and neither Ellie's tears nor her defiance were comforting matters to face upon her return from work. She had solved the problem of the play, the dance, the movie and the joy rides with gay parties of young folk, and she no longer sat up for Elspeth, dancing till the small hours. They had come to a satisfactory arrangement. Elspeth was to have definite evenings out; she was to be home at a stated hour, and her mother would know exactly who was her escort and who constituted the party. On the other hand, she agreed to allow her child to invite her friends to the house on the evenings she was in. Indeed the little house rang with mirth and music and motion day as well as night. Upon her return from work, it was no uncommon thing to hear the gramophone bleating out some banging waltz or foxtrot, as the whirling young couples ranged over the entire lower floor. Rugs were pulled up, and furniture thrust back to the wall. Elspeth's lovely, flushed face and starry eyes somehow compensated the mother for the sacrifice of those peaceful hours which in her heart of hearts she craved above all things.

Ellie always broke like a flower from the midst of the merriest group, and rushing to her mother, she would cry breathlessly something like this:

"Oh Muzzie, is'nt that just a pippin of a waltz song? Don't you just love it? Old thing dear, your supper's red hot in the oven. I've got it all fixed for you, angel."

Her mother often thought that she would have preferred to buy or make the cake herself rather than clean up after Elspeth, who thrust pans behind and under the stove, and piled pots and dishes and cups into pails and "any old place" where they could be hidden for the time being.

HOWEVER, the noise and movement that seemed always somehow to be in the wake of Elspeth and the upset house, over which a trail of the girl's things were scattered were minor matters compared with a more serious menace to the peace of mind of her mother. The business woman was none the less mother enough to regard with indulgence mere matters of noise and sauciness, and all girls at that age, she believed, had a constitutional reluctance to housework. Girls of Elspeth's time, thought her mother sadly, literally jazzed their way through life, while their bewildered and befuddled parents prayed for that period to pass hastily, and sometimes wondered why God had cursed them. So she blamed not her daughter for what she believed was the inherent nature of a girl of her age, and she endured with a mother's patience the affliction of the innocuous company of immature youngsters continually in her house, and that atmosphere of careless disorder that pervaded the place. Then suddenly she found herself fronted by a new problem—one that aroused her alarm and concern and kept her up nights, hovering at the top of the stairs or the hall, leaning over the banister to peer down and listen, till Elspeth should come slowly and reluctantly to bed.

All the way up in the car, Mrs. Maitland had been thinking of Hal Holloway, and of that tumultuous hour the night before, when her daughter had flown into a passion at her attempt to curb an affair that was taking on serious proportions.

HOLLOWAY was a newcomer in Elspeth's "crowd", and was older than her other friends. His people belonged on the West side of the town. A McGill student, home for the summer vacation, he had in some way drifted into this younger set on the humbler side of the city and of which Elspeth was the leading spirit and magnet. There was something magnetic about Elspeth's personality, something that drew about her all the young people of the neighborhood, and made her highly popular wherever she went. She seemed to live and thrive upon excitement and thrills. Elspeth had no patience with the leisurely wayfarers along life's pretty pathways; she herself was breathlessly engaged in hurtling her way through. It seemed to her mother that this strange child of hers was always running, like one in a breathless race, and many a time she tried to check and hold the girl back in her headlong career.

"Ellie, Ellie, don't go through life as if you were in a race to catch a train. There's whole heaps of time. Walk, dear, or better still, sit down awhile by the wayside."



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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.

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"Well, its going on just the same, and I don't see why you need to rub it in. It isn't my fault I'm only sixteen. I loathe being so young!"

"Don't be foolish, Ellie. You'll be old soon enough and. . ."

"I wish you wouldn't nag me all the time. Can't you let a fellow alone a minute?"

"That's not a nice way to talk to your mother, Elspeth."

"I don't care. You started it. I wish you'd leave me alone and not ask questions about things that—that arn't any one's business but mine. I guess I know how to take care of myself."

"You don't," said her mother quickly, "or you wouldn't sit in a darkened room with a young man, and you wouldn't let a stranger hold your hand. It was all I could do to keep from walking in and ordering him out of my house."

Elspeth had leaped up in bed, pulling the covers half off her mother.

"You wouldn't dare do such a thing."

"Yes, I would dare, Elspeth. I'd dare anything for your good."

"It wouldn't be for my good. It would kill me. I'd be so—so mortified I'd want to crawl into the smallest hole in the earth. I could never never look him or anyone else in the face after a thing like that."

"Lie down, Elspeth."

Even mothers are only human, and subject to irritation when exasperated beyond measure.

Elspeth subsided to the bed, but she still flung forth her defiance to her mother.

"Well, if you talk like that, I won't listen to you."

"You must listen to me, Elspeth. Now that we've started upon this subject, I have something to say to you, and questions I must ask you."

"I've got my two hands over my ears and I can't hear a word you say," cried the young rebel, while the older woman's hands itched to box those allegedly hidden ears. If her daughter lacked self control, she at least prayed for patience to endure this unwarranted defiance and gratuitous impudence. The long silence that followed was broken by a loud sob from the now secretly remorseful Elspeth, convinced that she had alienated her mother forever more. That sob however was sternly ignored by the indignant Mrs. Maitland, and the girl too proud to make the desired overtures, added fuel to the flame by bursting out with passionate abandon:

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"All right, then, I will tell you, since you want to know so much about us. I'm head over hands and heels in love with Hal Holloway, and so is he with me, and we adore the very ground he—I mean we—stand upon, and its all on account of you that we quarrelled to-night; but I'm going to make up with him the first thing to-morrow, and you'll see what we'll do. We're going to get married, that's what we are. You just wait and see if we don't."

"Don't be foolish, Ellie. You can't get married at your age. It's against the law. It can't be done, without my consent."

"We can too. He's of age already and I could easily pass for nineteen, and he knows a man that. . . So you see."

"All I see is that you are a very silly girl. I see too that I've been far too lenient with you, and it's just about time that I took some steps to restrain you. You've two more years to finish at High school. The reason you didn't pass last year is because you were fooling around with boys. If you had any sense you'd soon see that you cannot take anything they say seriously. They don't mean half the foolish stuff they talk about."

"I know the average boy doesn't, but Hal's different. He means every last word he says. He doesn't even know what it means to pretend that he cares for a girl when he doesn't. He told me that I was the only girl he'd ever known that he cared a button about. Those are his very words."

"All the same, I think I'll have to curtail his visits if it is going to upset you like this."

"Who's upset? What are you talking about now?"

"You are, and so am I. You will never make your grade at school if you don't get this boy nonsense out of your head."

Again Ellie jerked up in bed, wild and furious again.

"Thousands—millions of girls don't go through High school, and why should I, who hate it? I see myself going through."

"That's enough of that sort of talk. I'll send you to boarding school."

"Me? Boarding school?" Her voice rose shrilly. "I see myself going to prison. Oh yes, I'll go like a tame lamb, won't I though? Don't you see me?"

Her impudence was intolerable. Her mother had the impulse to whip her as she had done when Elspeth was a little girl, and in a tantrum would throw herself upon the floor and kick and scream with rage.

"Lie down. I've had enough of this."

"I want to know what. . ."

"Never mind that. The important thing is that we must have our sleep. I, because I must go to work in the morning, and you be-



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cause you are working yourself up to a senseless state of excitement about literally nothing."

"Is it *nothing* that for the first time in my whole life I should be madly in love with the only man I . . ."

"I don't want to hear any more of that ridiculous nonsense. You are too young to know your own mind and. . ."

Recklessly, passionately Elspeth flung her last bomb:

"What of you then? You didn't think *you* were too young to marry at my age. *You* went ahead and did as *you* liked, and I can do the same."

"Ellie, I want to go to sleep. You forget that I am a working woman."

"Who started this anyway?"

"Never mind that. Lie down there. We'll talk this over to-morrow."

BUT when to-morrow came, the clock pointed to 8.30 when Mrs. Maitland awoke, after a few hours sleep snatched toward morning. Elspeth lay with her flushed cheek turned into the pillow. The turbulent emotions of the night were all sunk into the deep sleep of health and youth, and her mother, with a sigh that had in it an element of compunction—after all, she should not have taken the child seriously she told herself—bent above her to drop a kiss upon the petulant young lips, ere, too late for breakfast, she hurried out for her day's work.

That day was long and hot. Part of the time her head ached and all day long she thought of Elspeth—Elspeth, sharp tongued and hot hearted. After all, her side to the question has to be considered. To her at least her love affair was a serious matter. She felt that she had handled the situation very badly. She should have kept her head and not allowed the child's extravagant expressions to offend or hurt her. Her self reproach was followed by an attempt to formulate some plan by which she might bring about a change in their mode of living. That was it—a change. They both needed it. They needed to break away from the habits and ties that chained them down like galley slaves. Elspeth was entitled to a real home, such as other girls had, and not the makeshift careless establishment over which there was no real head, and which floundered like a crazy derelict perilously near to the rocks. And Elspeth was entitled to a real mother. Not this business machine that could only throw to her a few snatches of her time. No wonder they had drifted so far apart that the girl preferred to pour her confidences into the ears of a stranger rather than

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her mother's. It was her own attitude, not Ellie's, that was to blame for their estrangement. Her nature was the antithesis of her daughter's. Shy, guarded, reticent, she held everyone at arm's length. But her little daughter—that was not right! They should not be so far apart; she should have affected some of that buoyancy of spirit so peculiar to her child, and which she sadly lacked. She wondered if it was because of her long life of work. She had been working now for seventeen years. That was quite a record. She took the full blame for Elspeth's angry retorts, her insolence, even her outbursts of temper. Elspeth had never been properly "raised". Her mother excused or drew a veil over each and all of her defects. She told herself that it was a career in itself to be a mother. She had stolen the greater or part of herself from Elspeth to whom it rightfully belonged and given it to an office—a mechanical business that ran along from day to day and year to year, built up and cultivated and toiled over for just one purpose, the unlovely pursuit of the everlasting dollar.

OF what are you thinking?"

The question came from the desk adjoining her own. For some time, her employer had been engaged in the pleasing study of Mrs. Maitland's lovely profile, pink ear and flushed cheek.

She came back to earth with a sigh, and met the quizzical glance with a troubled one.

"I was just thinking," she said, "that I'll have to quit."

He was moved enough to stare at her with dropped jaw. She had always been an enigma to him, this pretty woman content to labor along from year to year, without any of the pleasures or compensations that should have been the portion of one such as she. He knew of Elspeth, and surmised that "that girl" was the reason why her mother had never married, nor permitted herself even the friendship of a man. Once or twice Elspeth had come to the office, and there was that about her thorny little personality which apprised the employer of her mother that she was violently opposed to any one encroaching upon her mother's thought or time besides herself. Once he had escorted Mrs. Maitland home, after some night work at the office, and ascending the little steps to the house, he had made a slight motion to follow Mrs. Maitland into the house, when Elspeth, behind her mother's back, had deliberately closed the door in his face. It was such a quick act, so final and eloquent of the girl's opinion of him, or for that matter, any man who might be interested in her mother. Elspeth's attitude was similar to that she took about her mother's clothes and personal pos-



sessions. She had far more things than her mother, but she was utterly callous in the way she helped herself to what she chose of her mother's things, and even impudently justified this course, with one of the pretty, naughty tosses of her head:

"Muzzie, what's yours is mine, and what's mine's my own," she would say mischievously, and receive either a kiss or a reproving shake of the head, for Mrs. Maitland had a passion for keeping her things neatly and in order, and it was distracting to find all her possessions tossed over and hidden about in this or that drawer or lost. And so with men, or for that matter, women. Elspeth would have squelched any friendship of her mother's. "Muzzie" belonged to her and to her solely, and she didn't propose to share her with any other living soul in the world. She wanted "muzzie" to "mourn" a life time for that father whom she had so rosily colored in her imagination.

"Quit! You! That's a preposterous idea!"
"Even me!"

She was slightly smiling, and he noted that her eyes looked very tired. It occurred to him that she was not sleeping nights and he said gruffly:

"You need a vacation. Don't wait till August. Take it now."

"I need a permanent vacation," she said slowly. "I don't want to work any more. I'm tired out."

"Can you afford to quit?"

He studied her keenly, and with some anxiety. He knew little about her financial status. Her salary was a good one, for work of that sort. He would have liked to make it much larger, but there were three other partners in the concern, and they had to be considered. Her home, he knew was a modest one. Rent on that side of the city was low he had heard, but even so, it must cost considerable to maintain the place, even in the slap dash way in which "that girl" ran things. Elspeth, by the way, was the housekeeper of their peculiar menage. Furthermore, Elspeth he felt sure, must cost her mother a pretty penny for clothes and the thousand and one things he suspected she demanded and got from her mother. How, then, had it been possible for Mrs. Maitland to save enough out of her salary on which to retire. She took her time about replying to his query, as if she weighed the question in her mind and hesitated to reveal the meagreness of her resources even to this man whom she knew so well.

"It's true I haven't much."

She gave him a small wry smile, that somehow touched him:

"One can't save much on a Fairbanks-Ross salary." That was the name of the firm.

"Still, I've managed to keep up an endowment policy, and now it's about due. I can go along on that for awhile at least."

"I see. You know your own business. If you feel that you can carry on with the Insurance money. . ."

"Oh we couldn't live very high of course, but we'd manage somehow."

"Look here."

Her employer was leaning across the desk. He had grey curly hair and bushy eyebrows; otherwise his face was almost young, and he had a long lean body that stretched up like a young athlete's when he rose from his chair.

"Look here! What's the matter with you and I. . ."

"I know what you are going to say, but you can stop right there. No. That's final."

"You don't know what I'm going to say."

"Yes, I do, because you've said it before."

"Hmph! So I have, doggone it."

She laughed suddenly, and the pink glowed in her cheeks. She stood up, and began pinning on her hat. He blurted out angrily:

"I know I'm a tough old nut, but I'm square, and you might do worse."

"I know I might, and you're not tough. If you say hard things about yourself, I'll be very cross with you. I—I—will say instead that it's been fine to work for you, and in a way it's been a compensation for other things—this—this fellowship and friendship. I don't want anything else. It wouldn't do."

She held out her hand, which was first sulkily ignored and then grasped in a rough, strong hold.

"Good-b. . ." she began.

"None of that goodbye business now," he growled. "You go on your holiday. I've a hunch you'll be back soon. Your job and I will be waiting for you, together or separately, just as you say."

"Thanks, thanks, very much."

She wished that the warm clasp of that strong hand over hers did not have such a strange effect upon her. It was ridiculous that her heart should be thumping like that. Whatever in the world was the matter with her? Why, she was almost as foolish as Elspeth. Elspeth! At the thought of her girl, she withdrew her hand, crimsoning under the strange look of the man beside her.

"Well, goodbye, then," she said.

"Not on your life, it's not goodbye."



She laughed, and her laugh had a silvery tinkle. She was very pretty with her flushed cheeks and bright eyes.

"Goodnight, then."

"That's better."

He smiled now, and she knew the warmth and comfort of that smile. It set her blood racing, and she went out from the office feeling well and young again.

AS she stepped into the little hallway her first feeling was one of exasperation. Really, it was too bad of Elspeth not to have a single light going. She found and punched the button on the wall. The living room and hall were flooded with sudden light, but there was no one in even the farthest of corners, and not Ellie or young Holloway came from behind the folds of the portieres or from out the little sun room that adjoined the parlor. Elspeth had even omitted the pretense of a meal for her mother, and Mrs. Maitland found nothing better in the ice box than a cold mutton chop and a bit of wilted lettuce. She warmed over the chop and made herself some tea. The tea cleared her head, and when she went to her room, the dreariness of the day and the sense of exhaustion following her sleepless night pressed less heavily upon her. She even found herself smiling in a sort of absent way at her own face in the mirror.

After all, she was only thirty-five and in these days, women of thirty five, dressed and felt and looked like "chickens". That was one of Ellie's terms, and she laughed girlishly at the thought. Many women of her age "fixed up" a lot. A bit of talcum powder was her only assistance to the smooth and clear complexion with which nature had so kindly endowed her. Even her hair was untouched, though it was the fashion of even young girls to "henna" or "brighten up" their hair. Mrs. Maitland's had that live young growing look. Its waves were smooth and natural, and it was the color of dark gold. She said to herself suddenly:

"It's perfectly ridiculous for me to stand here and admire myself in this way. It doesn't matter the least little bit whether I'm young or old, or pretty or ugly. I'm just Elspeth's mother—that's all. Elspeth!"

Everywhere about that room Elspeth had left her mark. Even all around the edges of that mirror, photographs of the girl's friends had been stuck into the ridge. On the left side, quite prominently stuck out, there was a piece of white paper, and presently Mrs. Maitland saw it. Idly she pulled it out and unfolded it. Elspeth's childish handwriting was sprawled across either side of the sheet,

and right in the middle of the note there was an unmistakable smudge.

"Dearest Muzzie:

Now I know you're going to be awfully mad with me, but I just had to do it or bust. Hal and I adore each other, and we couldn't live another single day apart. So we are going to." Here a word had been scratched out. . . "away, and we're going to get married, whether the old law says we can or not. I know you'll say I'm too young and all the rest of that guff, but if you only knew how I fairly loathed that word—*young* you'd never use it again. Besides, I always remind myself that you were almost as young as I when you ran away and got married too, and Hal says what one person can do, so can another. So, Muzzie dear, do forgive me, and won't you like an old love, break the news to Hal's people. They'll be awful mad too, but we should worry. He's of age, and his parents can't do a thing about it, and he says he doesn't mind giving up college so long as he has me.—he says I'm worth ten colleges and more—and as for me, Oh muzzie love, I know you won't do anything to hurt your own and only daughter.

Elspeth."

Mrs. Maitland's hands shook. The paper fluttered from her fingers—drifted to the floor.

"Oh Ellie, Ellie!" she cried. "My baby!"

AFTER a long interval she picked up the letter, and read it through again. A smile forced its way to her lips, and her eyes were moist. How characteristic that letter was of Elspeth—poor, impulsive, hot-hearted, hot-headed child! Elspeth, who loathed Youth! Ah! If she but knew!

Holloway! That was the boy's name. Ellie had asked her to break the news to his people. But who were his people and how was she to find them. Calgary was a big city now—80,000 population, and more and more people were coming in with every year. Still, the name was not a common one; indeed it was the name of the biggest man in the country so far as that went. It was plainly her duty, at all events to discover who were Hal Holloway's people, and, as Ellie had required, acquaint them with the fact of their son's marriage.

She went slowly down to the little hall again, and sat by the telephone table, turning over the leaves till she came to the H's, and then running her finger down till she came to the clan of Holloway. Five of them had telephones, and these one by one she called, and



ELSPETH

to each query whether they had a son named Harold or Hal, came back the clear response. No, they had not.

There remained then merely the one name, Senator T. Beveridge Holloway, the big man of Alberta. She became flustered at the thought that he could possibly be the father of Ellie's young man. In her little world of work and Elspeth, she had learned very little concerning the families of any of the handful of Alberta magnates, as she lacked that feminine quality of curiosity that caused people to pry into the intimate secrets of their neighbors and fellow townspeople. She was indifferent to and most incapable of gossip.

She put her finger in the circle that caused the little automatic disc to ring, and the number W 4839 revolved around. A gruff voice at the other end admitted he was Senator Holloway, and a moment later, yes, he had a son named or known as Hal, though, shouted the senator, the lad's name was Harold Beveridge Holloway.

Then she broke the news to him, a bit tremulously, without awe of the magnate, but with a sympathetic thrill as she realized the power of the man who was now her Elspeth's father-in-law.

"You're son and my daughter have eloped and. . ."

"What's that you say? What are you talking about?"

She replied:

"I said your son and my daughter have eloped. They are married now."

There was a silence, bristling with explosive energy, and presently a voice shot back through the 'phone.

"Who are you?"

"You mean my name? It's Maitland."

"Never heard it before. Who are you, and what the blazes do you mean by coming with a story like that. Who are you? What do you do?"

"Why I—I'm a stenographer in the Fairbanks-Ross company's office, and I. . ."

"A stenographer!"

He shouted the word as if it were something offensive and damnable.

"And you're trying to tell me you've hooked my boy, are you?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm trying to tell you that your son is married to my daughter."

"Like hell he is!"

THE QUILL

Words were sizzling at the other end, and somehow the fury reminded her strangely of Ellie when Ellie was in one of her tantrums. This Senator Holloway was barely able to stutter, and the oaths he was using were unbelievably grotesque and strange. A string of them followed one after another in a long stream, and words were cut in half for oaths to be slipped in between.

Mrs. Maitland stared at that telephone, the color ebbing and flowing from her cheeks. That she should be called such names, and spoken to in this dreadful fashion. That she should be accused of conspiring to. . ."

She let the telephone receiver lie on the table, but the shouting, fearfully swearing voice issued from its end no longer at her ear."

" . . . not a G. . . d. . . penny! Two more years at college. . . cut him off. . . young cub. . . blanketty blank fool. . . couple of adventuresses and cheat swindlers, blackmailers. . . I'll show you. . . an."

After a while she gingerly lifted the telephone receiver and hung it back upon the hook. Then her finger slowly picked out another number, and whirled the disc around.

"Mr. Fairbanks?"

"The same."

"Mrs. Maitland speaking. About our conversation to-day. I've changed my mind."

"Told you you would." What's the reason?"

"Well, I've just changed my mind, that's all."

"Glad to hear it. What about that Insurance?"

"I—I've got to use it for something else. You see I—I've got another person to support now and. . ."

"What? Say that again."

"Yes, another person—a boy at college. I want him to go on. He—He's my son-in-law you see!"

"Well, for the love of Pete. Has that girl gone and done it?"

"Oh yes, and I think it's my duty to take care of them both, and that's why I have to keep my—my job. I hope you haven't advertised yet—have you?"

"Not yet, but I will unless you'll do something for me."

"What?"

"Got your hat on. I'm coming over with my car. You're going for a ride with me."

Her voice was vibrant, a young treble voice, quite as sweet as a girl's and with even the little thrill of laughter to it that somehow was characteristic rather of Elspeth.

"I don't mind," she said.

