

FIRELIGHT FANCIES.

BY MARY SHAW.

I beam, I glow, I flush, I start
From under ev'ry cover;
I own as quick a changing heart
As any tickle lover.

I shimmer softly on the floor,
I gleam a glow uncanny;
I linger lovingly, and pour
Soft light in nook and cranny.

And ever, as I shine or fade,
I tell a true life-story;
A period in the depths of shade,
The next in heights of glory.

Give the fuel (my life) a stir,
Note the flames that follow oft.
Rouse, dreamers, then. Do not demur;
Act wisely, and look aloft.

You'd scarcely deem my radiance sprung
From a somber stick of wood.
Nor guess the power, its fibers 'mong
For vast evil or great good.

Nor think, perhaps, some flower fair,
Sprung from earth mixed with ashes;
Nor that you breathe the same pure air
Which helps feed my bright flashes.

And when I die, as when I glow,
I tell a true life-story;
I fade, the ashes fall, and lo!
They live in a flower's glory!

SOUTH KAUKAUNA, WIS.

DO LISTEN TO REASON.

Smoking tranquilly in an easy-chair one evening in June, Major Hartwell was roused from the deep and painful reverie into which he had fallen by a step in the hall and a knock on his parlor door.

"Come!" he said, and a smile lighted up his grave, handsome face, for both step and knock were familiar to him, and if there was any man on earth whom he held near and dear, that man was he who now entered.

"I was beginning to wonder what had become of you, Arthur," stretching out a welcoming hand, which Arthur Hazard took in a warm grasp.

"I have been unusually busy," and Arthur threw himself into a chair. "I've been getting ready to leave town for a few weeks, and haven't had time to even think of my friends."

"Then you've come to say *au revoir*."

"Yes; I'm off to-morrow by the early train. I wish you were going with me, Cyril."

"I can't leave the city now. Besides, I shouldn't enjoy having nothing to do. I haven't taken a vacation since I left the army. Where are you going?"

"To a place called Westholt, down in Buckingham County."

The Major started, and a shadow crept over his face—the shadow of a past sorrow, the memory of which was very painful to him.

"I am going to visit the big man of the place—Squire Drayton," continued Arthur, carelessly. "I made his acquaintance a few months ago by the merest accident. He was pleased to take a fancy to me, and invited me to his place. Some one was telling me the other day that the Squire had one of the prettiest daughters imaginable. So, you can prepare yourself for anything in the way of news when I come back."

He paused, laughing, and expecting some facetious reply; but Major Hartwell was silent. The shadow had deepened on his face into a look of pain.

"What's the matter, Hartwell? You look as if you had seen a ghost. Are you envying me my good luck?"

"No; I have no desire to go to Westholt. I shall never go there again."

"Ah! You have been there before me, then?"

"Yes; I was once engaged to be married to Lois Drayton."

"You were? Excuse me, Major. If I had known that I would never have spoken to you; but no hint of anything of the sort had ever reached me. Are you willing to tell me about it?"

"Yes; had I not been, I would not have mentioned it at all. It isn't a very long story, but I think it a very unusual one. I met Lois Drayton when my regiment was stationed near Westholt, and we were engaged for a year. I know she loved me; I have never doubted that, though what followed would have led almost any man to believe her utterly wanting in anything approaching affection. We were to be married on the 10th of October, and the wedding was to be a grand affair. At the Drayton relatives far and near were invited, and the Squire had prepared for bonfires, fireworks and general enthusiasm. I went down to Westholt on the morning of the 9th and had no fault to find with the welcome I received from Lois. I thought I had never seen her in a happier mood, and we had a long talk about our future and made all sorts of plans, which I little thought were never to be realized. We spent a very happy afternoon in the great, dusky parlor, and after supper the Squire took me out for a long walk, wishing to show me some improvements he had made in drainage and parking. We left Lois in the hall, talking to an old woman who had come to get some medicine for a sick child. I remember that I looked back when I reached the yard and waved my hand to my little girl, thinking how sweet and fair and gentle she looked as she stood listening to the description of the child's illness. Ah, me! I did not dream that it was our last parting—that I was never to see her again!"

"Never to see her again?" echoed Arthur Hazard, as his friend paused.

"No; I have never seen her since that evening. When the Squire and I returned to the house, a couple of hours later, we found that she had gone to administer the medicine herself to the child, and on reaching home again had retired at once to her room, and had sent for her aunt, Mrs. Andrews, who had taken the place of a mother to her for many years. Mrs. Andrews found her phone on a rug, her left hand grasping it in her agony.

Gently raising her, Mrs. Andrews endeavored to learn the cause of her pale and agitated condition, but she would explain nothing, simply stating that a great sorrow had come over her life. She simply wished, she said, to send a message to me. It was that she absolutely refused to marry me. Yes, on the very eve of our wedding she had changed her mind. And she would give no reason for the change, nor would she consent to see me. Her father and aunt remonstrated and argued with her in vain. She simply wept and maintained her mysterious silence. And the end of it all was that I left Westholt the next day, together with my best man and the half-dozen bridesmaids. The affair created a great deal of gossip, but no one has ever been able to get to the bottom of it."

"Perhaps Miss Drayton heard something against you," suggested Hazard.

"No; that question was asked her, and she insisted that she had not."

"And you do not think her merely fickle?"

"And there was no other lover?"

"No. She had other suitors, of course, but I was the only one for whom she had expressed any regard."

"And she has never given any explanation of her singular action?"

"Never. I see her father occasionally, and he has repeatedly assured me that she maintains her mysterious silence. They never mention my name to her now. She requested them not to do so."

"I wish, for your sake, I could get at the root of the matter, Major. Suppose I try, I will have a good opportunity. Thank you for your interest. But there is no reason to think you will succeed. No; I must bear

my sorrow as best I can. I must not hope, for hope would end only in despair."

In the train the next day, on the way to Westholt, Arthur Hazard remembered the story he had heard, and he felt a great curiosity to see the heroine of so peculiar a tale.

Squire Drayton was the richest landed proprietor in the large and fertile county in which Westholt was situated. His house was a handsome, rambling building, surrounded by trees, and overlooking beautiful gardens, rich pastures, and well-tiled fields.

His family consisted of his daughter Lois, a widowed sister, and a nephew, the son of his only brother.

Arthur liked Lois at once. She was a refined-looking girl of about twenty-five years of age, with large, soft brown eyes, an olive complexion, an abundance of chestnut hair, and a lithe and graceful figure; but she was shy and reserved, and talked little, even to her father.

Arthur rather prided himself upon his ability to read character. He thought he understood that of Lois, and the fact that she had been able to keep secret for three years her reasons for refusing to marry the man she loved puzzled him very much.

"She does not look like a woman who could keep a secret," he thought. "I should say that she could be frightened into almost anything. She has a weak mouth, and is credulous and timid."

This opinion was strengthened as he became more acquainted with her, and he felt a greater desire than ever to penetrate the mystery which surrounded her broken engagement.

"Perhaps Henry Drayton can help me," he thought.

And, with this object in view, he cultivated that young man's acquaintance.

But the Squire's nephew proved of a surly, unsociable nature, and showed no disposition to meet Arthur's advances even half way.

Arthur at length concluded to let him severally alone, and turned his attention to Mrs. Andrews, who was a kind, motherly woman, fond of talking, and of a genial, confiding nature.

She had taken a great fancy to Arthur, and he found it easy to draw from her all that she knew or surmised concerning her niece's love affair.

But she could tell him very little, and it was substantially the same as he had heard from the Major.

"Is her cousin in love with her?" asked Arthur, with a start of surprise.

"Yes; he has been in love with her for years, and has asked her half a dozen times to marry him. He was keenly disappointed when she became engaged to Major Hartwell, but bore it much better than I had expected. His wedding-gift to her was as handsome as anything she received, and he could ill afford such a present, for his income is very small, and he is partially dependent on my brother. I think he is still bent on winning her, and probably thinks she will consent to marry him at last from weariness at his persistence. But I think that scarcely possible."

The day following that on which he had had this conversation with Mrs. Andrews, Arthur was walking through a field with the Squire, who was explaining his method of fertilization, when all at once they were startled by a loud "Good-morning, Squire," uttered in a clear, feminine voice.

They turned, and saw a young woman standing on a low stile which separated the field from a tiny orchard, in the middle of which was a small cottage, overgrown with vines.

"Good-morning, Rose," said the Squire, coldly, and then continued his conversation with Arthur.

The young woman appeared a little piqued at being thus summarily disposed of, and tossed her head pettishly, her bold black eyes fixed on Arthur, whose young, athletic figure evidently took her fancy.

But she did not speak again, and the Squire soon moved away from the vicinity of the stile.

"I hear that Rose Ellis is back again," said Mrs. Andrews, at the dinner-table.

"Yes, I saw her this morning," said the Squire.

"I hoped when she went away that we were rid of her for ever"—and Mrs. Andrews sighed. "Her grandmother told me that she had excellent wages and was getting along well. I wonder what has induced her to return."

"Pure devility, of course," said the Squire. "She'll have the whole neighborhood by the ears in a week's time. Rose isn't happy unless she is the central figure of a perpetual broil."

"She is a very handsome girl," said Arthur, "but of a very coarse style."

"Her beauty has been her bane," said Mrs. Andrews.

"Her grandmother used to be housekeeper here a great many years ago, but lately she has lived in a little cottage the Squire gave her, about a mile away. Rose has almost broken the poor old woman's heart; she has an idea that her beauty will pave her way into a higher sphere than that in which she was born, and in some way she manages to make the acquaintance of nearly every gentleman who comes into the neighborhood. Then a fuss of some kind is always sure to follow."

"I believe she would stoop to anything to gain her end," said the Squire. "She is unscrupulous to the last degree, and utterly without delicacy or refinement. I beg you to avoid her. Hazard, or you may have a noose about your neck before you know it. She is extremely artful, and her beauty and audacity make her dangerous."

Neither Lois nor Henry made any remark on the subject; but, glancing at the latter, Arthur saw that his face was scarlet, and that his hands shook as he took a cup of coffee a servant handed him.

"Evidently he has had some experiences of the wiles of the fair Rose," thought Arthur, and felt very sorry for him.

But, a little later, pity was changed to a very different emotion.

The Squire's household retired early, as is customary in the country, and at ten o'clock that night Arthur was on his way to his room.

He was about to enter it, when he saw a scrap of paper folded like a note lying just outside his door. He picked it up, and, opening it, read as follows:

"Meet me to-night at the big oak tree near the pasture-gate. I will be there at eleven, and you must not fail to come. I must and will see you."

He crept closer, and could distinguish the forms of a man and a woman standing facing each other. The woman was speaking now, and Arthur paused.

"I tell you once for all that I won't wait any longer," she was saying, in a fierce, sullen tone. "I've waited long enough. I've come back to make you keep your promise, and you can't put me off again with excuses. If you don't look out you'll get yourself into trouble."

"Hush! you can't be too careful what you say," and Arthur, to his amazement, recognized the low, cautious voice as that of his host's nephew. "I tell you it will come all right if you only have a little patience. Every one says she can't live long, and when I have a little money to bless myself with you'll see that I won't forget you. If I'll only keep quiet I'll have matters settled in six months' time."

"That's just what you said last year, and the year before, and the year before that. While I'm having a little patience you'll be getting married to Lois Drayton. Oh, I've had things told me! There's them who

watches out for me. No, you'll marry me now and we'll wait together for your cousin's money."

"I tell you it would be madness for me to take such a step. I, too, do listen to reason. I wouldn't come in for a cent if you were my wife. Wait a while, and do make up your mind to go away for a few months."

"No, you can't throw no more dust in my eyes. If you'd been honest and meant what you said, you wouldn't have put me off so long. And if I had known you as well three years ago as I do now, I wouldn't have taken any part in cheating your cousin. I'd have let her marry her gentleman."

"Hush, hush, Rose, for Heaven's sake! It would ruin us both if you should be overheard."

"Who's to overhear me? I rather guess there ain't many folks hereabouts out of their beds at this hour."

"Still, you can't be too careful. Come, let's walk toward the cottage; we can talk as we go along."

They moved away, and Arthur heard no more.

But he had heard enough to fill him with the keenest suspicion and distrust.

Was it possible that at last he had stumbled on a clew to the mystery that had baffled him ever since his arrival at Westholt?

"She must have told Lois some big yarn against the Major," thought Arthur.

But then he remembered that Lois had declared positively that she had heard nothing against the character of her brother.

Arthur closed the door and motioned to her to take a seat on the sofa. She did so, and he sat down by her side, a little puzzled how best to begin his task. The light fell full on her face. He could see every change in its expression, which was exactly what he desired.

"Miss Lois," Arthur began, "I have not told you, I think, that the best friend I have on earth is Cyril Hartwell."

Every particle of color forsook her face, a nervous trembling seized her, and she put out her hand imploringly toward him.

"Do not speak of him," she said, in a low, shaken voice. "I—I cannot bear it; and—and it is useless. What I said three years ago I must insist, however, that you listen to what I have to tell you—something you must hear," said Arthur.

"It can make no difference in—anything," she said, still in the same low, hesitating voice.

"I must insist, however, that you listen to what I have to tell you, Miss Drayton. I assure you that you will not regret having done so. I did not know until just before I came down here what it was that had so saddened Cyril Hartwell's life. I have known him only a little more than two years, and he is not one to carry his heart on his sleeve. But he told me the story of his acquaintance with you the night before I left town; but he could not tell me why it was that you refused to marry him the very day before the one set for the wedding."

"I have never told any one that, I never shall. It is useless to ask me to do so. I would do sooner."

"Will you not let me tell him?" asked Arthur.

"Will you not let me tell him?" asked the Squire, sternly. "No punishment would be too severe for you. At present, however, I cannot determine what steps to take. You may go, and I hope never to see your face again!"

Rose quailed under the looks leveled upon her, and shrank from the room, unable to make any reply.

The Squire then sent for his nephew, and a stormy interview ensued. Henry Drayton had no excuse to offer for his treachery save his love for Lois, and this his uncle refused to accept.

"Go," he said. "You are the son of my only brother, and I loved him well, but I hope heaven will spare me the pain of ever hearing your name again."

An hour later Henry Drayton had left his uncle's house for ever, and a few days later sailed for Australia, accompanied by Rose Ellis, the guilty partner of his villainy.

Arthur Hazard was eager to inform Major Hartwell of the happy turn affairs had taken, and rode into Westholt at once to dispatch a telegram to him.

"You ought to be sorry," said the Squire, sternly. "No punishment would be too severe for you. At present, however, I cannot determine what steps to take. You may go, and I hope never to see your face again!"

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