

PARDONED AT LAST.

A THRILLING CHRISTMAS STORY, BY "JACK FROST."

Mr. Dene was seated in his study the day prior to the party, which promised to come off with great eclat.

Not a single refusal came to the very numerous invites which had been sent out. Among the expected guests were many titled individuals, as well as others distinguished in politics, science, and art.

"I wonder whether they would accept my hospitality if they knew that I was a returned convict," he asked himself with a cynical smile. "I am wealthy, my daughter is beautiful and accomplished; but my secret, if once known to the world, might hurl me back upon the past, and blight her young life."

Rising, he paced the narrow confines of this mysterious room—of which more hereafter—a dark frown on his face, suppressed passion at his heart, which shone in his eyes with a light that was not good to see.

"If it were not for her sake I would feel a fierce pleasure in telling them to-morrow who and what I am—an escaped convict; one who had dined with the worst of criminals—murderers, and others of that ilk. My house would soon be emptied, although many of them would, like the Jews of old, regret the flesh-pots of Egypt, and sigh to think that such splendid hospitality as mine should be lost to them for ever. And yet I swear before Heaven that I was guilty of no crime; that I suffered innocently."

His words poured forth in a torrent, as if addressed to some unseen being, while a savage joy lit up his features at some deep hidden thought that had not as yet found expression.

He was given to speaking aloud when alone, and continued—

"I must tell Myrtle all before I launch her on the world of fashion and pleasure. I wish the necessity did not exist. It is a painful duty, and must be performed. The lesson, if taken to heart, may save her from much future misery, and guard her against the wiles and blandishments of a hollow, treacherous world."

He looked around the room with a keen sense of pleasure, and yet, beyond a glass cabinet in which were jars, each labelled methodically, and a rack containing some curious arms, there was nothing of interest apparently.

Indeed, anyone knowing how jealously he guarded this spot from intrusion would wonder why he did so, there being nothing of value in it to tempt the cupidity of even the meanest thief, except it might be the arms aforesaid.

"She must share all my secrets, or when the hour arrives she would be powerless to help me or avert danger from herself," he muttered, as he took down from a shelf a hollow reed, and drawing aside a curtain, which shrouded a corner of the room, disclosed the life-size figure of a man.

The face moulded in wax was a handsome one, but of sinister expression, and on the left cheek were three moles, so placed as to form a letter V in outline.

This distinctive feature would enable anyone to identify the original. Nature had set its mark indelibly on that face; it might be to warn persons of danger, just as it has given rattles to the rattlesnake and a hood to the cobra. Be this as it may, the mark was there, and was ineradicable. The same expression that had terrified Myrtle at their meeting on Christmas Day reappeared now as he looked at that face. He was livid with passion, his eyes blood-red with fury, and had murder in them if ever eyes had.

"You fought me with cunning hate—with fiendish malice," he hissed; "and I, some day, for death will not come to either until we stand face to face, will conquer you with this reed—a reed only."

Placing the tube to his lips, he blew, and out sped a little dart, striking a spot in the centre of that strangely-formed V.

At first it would appear as if he were mad or childish, to thus menace the image of his enemy with a toy resembling a puff and dart. But one look at his face proclaimed the fact that anger, passion, revenge were stamped on it, not insanity.

Drawing the curtain over the figure, he replaced the reed on the shelf, and, battling with his emotions, subdued them speedily as only a strong nature could. Half an hour later he led Myrtle into this Boudoir chamber, her little heart beating high with curiosity, not unmingled with fear.

Dressed in white, with roses in her dark hair, she looked the very embodiment of innocence—a sacrificial victim about to be offered up on the shrine of—what?

Placing a chair for her, he said: "Myrtle, the time has arrived when I feel it imperative on me to lift the veil of the past, and to make you the custodian of family secrets. To-morrow you enter the world through golden gates and surrounded by the sweet incense of admiration; to-day it will be as well for you to learn that that world, like another Eden, has a serpent in it with which you may have to do battle."

She murmured something, turned pale, and glanced round the half-darkened room in fear and trembling, as if half expecting to see some apparition.

Nor was she disappointed, for he drew aside the curtain, and she saw that face, at sight of which she gave a half-suppressed scream.

"Pshaw, girl, it cannot harm you! Look well at it, imprint that face on your memory, that mark especially—pointing to the three moles—and if ever you meet its owner, in that hour know that he is your deadly enemy and mine, that he killed your mother as surely as if he had plunged a dagger into her heart, and consigned me to years of torture and suffering—to a living purgatory."

The face seemed to fascinate her, and it flashed across her brain that she had seen it somewhere—in a dream, perhaps!

But when her thoughts got clearer, her mind calmer, she recollected it all.

It was the face of the man who had saved her from death on the river, and to whom all the love of her fresh young heart had been freely given—the face without that mark or sinister expression; and with a low wail of anguish she fainted.

"Fool that I am; I was too rash, too precipitate!" her father muttered, as he sprinkled her face with water. "I forget she is only a child yet, and that for two whole years her life has been unruined by a single emotion save that of pleasure and content. The shock has been too great for her nerves."

"Are you better, dear Myrtle?" he asked softly, as her eyes unclosed.

"Better? Where am I?" she said, looking round in terror.

"With me, my darling," he said, caressing her little head fondly. "I had no idea the mere sight of a face moulded in wax would terrify you, child."

"Whose face is it?" she asked eagerly.

"The Duke of Brittany's."

"Thank heaven!" she exclaimed in accents of joy.

"Why do you ask that, child? Surely you and he never met—he has not tracked you down already?"

"No; oh, no, papa! indeed we have not. I hope we never shall, for it was a cruel face." This with a shudder.

"Aye, crueler than the grave," he said moodily. "The Duke is your uncle; your mother's brother."

"Did you ever injure him, papa?" she asked secretly pleased that he did not ply her with further questions about her fervid exclamation of "Thank Heaven!" lest he should worm the precious secret from her that she loved and was beloved.

"Yes—his pride. I met your mother in Paris, where I was in practice as a physician; we fell in love, and were married secretly."

"And for that he was so revengeful?" she said, almost incredulously; the punishment was so disproportionate to the offence.

"His is the pride of Lucifer, child; it was a mortal offence that I, a commoner, should have wedded his sister. I was wealthy and well-born, but had no blue blood in my veins—an unpardonable offence in his eyes."

"I cannot understand such natures, papa," she remarked. "If two people love each other dearly, are all the world to each other, why should a mere accident of birth prevent their being happy?"

"To people of that class, child, such reasoning is heresy—they would tell you that the eagle does not mate with the sparrow-hawk, the lion with anything less noble. I suffered for love's sake—Heaven grant you never may."

"I feel I hate that man already, that I could crush him under my heel as I would a viper," she cried, with a vehemence of passion no one but he would have suspected her of.

"The day may come, Myrtle, when you will be tested by actions, not words," he said, slowly, deliberately.

"You shall not find me a coward," she answered, with flashing eyes. "Have I not suffered through him? Consigned from early infancy to a loveless life, bereft of all ties until you claimed me!"

"Your position was a cruel necessity. I was a convict, serving out my time in Siberia. During my exile of seventeen years my wealth accumulated to colossal dimensions, until to-day I am the proud possessor of one of the finest fortunes in England; and yet I would gladly become poor again to gain—"

"To gain what?" she asked, turning pale.

"Vengeance! I made that thought my idol, my almost god; in all these lonely years it was my companion night and day, sleeping and waking, and now I only wait for its consummation."

"Papa, the world is wide enough for you both. You have me to live for now; have I not been desolate long enough? Do you wish, for the sake of vengeance, to doom me to a solitary life! You are the only friend I possess in the whole wide world. You, too, have suffered a life's martyrdom; but will vengeance bring back dear mother to life?"

"Myrtle, do you flinch from the task already?" he asked, with flashing eyes.

"No; all I ask is that you will not seek him; if he dares to cross your path again, to carry on the old vendetta, then crush him, and I, your daughter, will help you."

Seeing he hesitated to give up his long cherished scheme, she rose, threw her white arms round his neck, pressed her cheek to his, and pleaded:

"Papa, I ask, pray, that you will not rush into danger, for dear mother's sake;—to lose you would be to break my heart."

"Child, you will be guarded by gold. All my fortune will be yours if I die in pursuit of the one great object of my life."

"What care I for wealth! I yearn for love and sympathy; would you condemn me to utter solitude—shatter my young life heedlessly on its very threshold?"

"Think of what I must have suffered. He drove me away from France; I found a new home in Russia. He followed me, and through his agency I was falsely accused of being concerned in a political plot against the Czar's life. My life was spared, but I was condemned to perpetual imprisonment in Siberia. While there news reached me of your mother's death."

"Twas cruel of him; but you are free now," she pleaded; "to enjoy a daughter's love and devotion. Heaven may have years of unalloyed happiness in store for you; and, remember, Heaven, too, avenges when man fails!"

He could not resist her prayers—her entreaties—which melted his heart, because she pleaded for love's sake—a love of father for daughter, child for parent.

"I was as it the voice of an angel struggled for his soul's salvation and, in struggling, conquered."

That evening Myrtle and Miss Becky Pride were seated together in the former's boudoir chatting over the arrangements for next day's reception.

Poor Myrtle longed to get away to the river, because her heart was there, and the sweetest music was his voice.

ask you a question," said her companion, after a long chat about dress, &c., things dear to the feminine heart, accompanying her words with a beaming smile. "Who is the gentleman you so frequently meet?"

Myrtle coloured, and bent her eyes on the floor as if studying the pattern of the carpet, but remained silent.

"You see, dear, your papa would never forgive me if you became entangled in any serious fashion. A little harmless flirtation does no harm, except that sometimes it leads up to a 'grand passion,' the continued, 'I have no wish, dear, to pry into your little secrets, but I am responsible to your papa. You are not offended, dear?'"

"Oh, no; but must I tell papa?" asked Myrtle, stealing a furtive glance at her companion, and unconsciously betraying her burning secret to this woman of the world, who smiled behind her fan at the artless, childish confession.

"Much depends upon what had passed between you, dear. Has—er—has the gentleman asked you to be his wife?"

"Oh, no; not yet. You see, he saved my life, and then he used to meet me; and— and, we got to like each other very much—and that is all," said Myrtle, in a state of blushing confusion, that made her look more beautiful than ever.

"Well, dear, I think the matter had better go no further; it might develop into something you could not control. Of course, he has told you his name?"

"Oh, yes; Eric Peyton."

"A very good name, dear; very good. Is he a connection of the Gloucestershire Peppons?"

"I think so; he is so nice. I'm sure you would like him," said Myrtle eagerly, at which her companion laughed sweetly, saying—

"There is no occasion for my liking him, dear; your papa must be consulted, not me. Has Mr. Peyton ever spoken to you of his prospects? Excuse the question; but you have no mother to advise or counsel you, dear, and I only wish to take the place of one for the moment."

"He must be well-off, if that is what you mean," remarked Myrtle, somewhat coldly.

"He lives at Barnes; but if he were ever so poor, and papa would let me, I'd marry him. Why should a question of money come between us? Papa has enough for us both."

"Will you promise not to meet him again, dear, until I have made a few inquiries? Your papa may have some project of his own; you are sufficiently wealthy to marry a title. I am very, very sorry, this has happened; it may get us both into mischief."

"I'll take all the blame," said Myrtle, eagerly. "Papa will meet him to-morrow."

"Are they on my list, Miss Dene?" she asked with a quiet assumption of authority that took Myrtle quite aback, and brought a frown to her face.

"I have invited them, and my father approves," she said, icily; "pray do not continue the discussion. I am quite old enough to take my proper place in my own household—please recollect that in future."

Becky Pride, as Molly insisted on calling her, cast down her eyes at this rebuff; her face crimsoned. She was quick to perceive her error. She had mistaken Myrtle's character, and thought defence meant submission; but she liked the girl none the better for putting her right.

"Still waters run deep" is an old saying; quiet natures are often slumbering volcanoes, and burst forth when least expected.

The governess was playing for high stakes. Mr. Dene was a widower; if she could gain a quiet ascendancy over Myrtle, she might find in her a willing ally in furtherance of her ambitious scheme to become Mrs. Dene.

Her first move on the board commenced that evening in questioning her about Mr. Peyton, and she thought it might lead to a win until Myrtle had checked her.

She saw her supremacy was gone, that in Myrtle she had a mistress, not a pupil; but she was too much the woman of the world to show resentment.

This was only a skirmish, and a defeat in a minor detail sometimes leads a skillful general on to victory when forces meet in a death struggle.

Becky Pride had not been an inmate of Fairlawn House very long before she perceived that there was a mystery of some sort attaching to the family.

A wealthy man need not have lived a life of seclusion for the sake of having his daughter's education completed.

That Myrtle had been sadly neglected she saw from the first moment of entering upon her duties. This proved conclusively one of two things: either the father's wealth had come into his possession suddenly, or he had by some mischance been separated from his child.

His manners were those of a man who at one period, if not always, had mixed with good society, the very highest in fact. Why then should his child have been so sadly neglected?

His Blue Beard's chamber was another fertile source of thought to her. Taking everything into consideration, she felt assured that there was a skeleton in the family cupboard; and now that Myrtle had dared to fling down the gauntlet of defiance, she meant to unearth it as quickly as might be, and hold trump cards which, if played at the right moment might lead on to fortune.

"I apologise, dear Myrtle," she said, softly, like the purr of a cat, whose talons, nevertheless, are not sheathed. "When I said my list I meant only that knowing the best families, I selected those which would give most eclat to your party. Surely, I am forgiven?"

"Yes, a thousand times," cried Myrtle, impulsively, throwing her arms around her neck and kissing her. "I am a little irritable, I fear. There, dear, we are friends again, are we not?"

"Friends, always friends," purred Miss Becky. "Confide in me, dear; my experience may prove of use to you yet. You will be prudent?"

"Yes, not only prudent, but faithful to death in papa's interests."

"There is some secret," thought Miss Pride. "Her very words reveal that. Mine be the task to discover it, and then, Myrtle Dene, I shall be as exacting as I am now seemingly submissive."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

John Matthews, a fishmonger at Mile End, New Town, Middlesex, dropped dead recently while in the act of committing suicide. The medical man who was called in stated at the inquest that there was a knife wound on deceased's neck, but that it was not sufficient to cause death. The face was congested, and witness believed that the man died instantaneously from an apoplectic fit, while in the very act of cutting his throat.

BRITISH NEWS.

It is proposed to establish direct steamship communication between Arbroath and London.

A Leeds butcher has been sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment for keeping diseased beef to make potted meat.

The Highland Railway are surveying for a new line from Muir of Ord, through the Black Isle, to Fortrose and Cromarty.

The building lands, etc., of a farm at Stromness were sold lately for £465. A few years ago the steading alone cost £1250 to erect.

Ludgate Hill, going toward St. Paul's, is being widened. There is one of the narrowest passages in London's greatest thoroughfare.

At the college for the blind at Worcester the pupils play at football with a basket-ball enclosing a bell, and walk on stilts with perfect fearlessness.

The manager of the Inverness Tweed Mill Company was fined 5s. recently for employing four female workers in the mill after working hours.

A body of a man missing for six months was found a short time ago tied beneath a boat in the boat-house of Worcester, the corpse half eaten by eels.

A curious epidemic known as red water has caused the deaths of 119 head of cattle out of 770, on board the steamer Oxenholme at Liverpool from Boston.

The last session of the British Parliament was composed of 122 sittings. There were 8,545 speeches, the Government using up 1,625. Gladstone made 42.

The modern war ships seem to be much freer from strokes of lightning than the old wooden vessels, the modern precautions being so much more effective.

During the excavation for the Manchester Ship Canal some remains of the wild red deer, with malformed horns, were dug up near the bed of the river Irwell.

The three new Canadian Pacific steamers are to be built at Barrow-in-Furness. There was great competition among the foremost contractors to secure the contract.

A farm in Fishers, which has been let for many years at £400 a year, has just been re-let at £230, and the proprietor is to expend a considerable sum in improvements.

The London Lady Guide Association seems to be flourishing. It has taken new and larger rooms, and all its departments, of which there are several, are said to be doing well.

A tricyclist named Bidlake has succeeded in riding a tricycle to the General Post-office, York, to the General Post-office, London, a distance of 167 miles, in the unprecedented time of 18.28 min.

A crow's nest containing three eggs was found near Manchline a fortnight ago. There are several rookeries in the neighborhood, but the birds have never before been known to breed more than once a year.

Monaco, to which only Consuls are accredited, has a big diplomatic corps in the rest of Europe, and its diplomats display a profusion of gold lace and titles purely for the honor of serving the principality gratis.

Lord Wolsey's Australian brother—the squatter who is said to have fashioned an extraordinary sheep-shearing machine—is stated to have arranged the flotation of his invention on the London market. The capital is fixed at £200,000.

In a parish church a few miles to the east of Glasgow the elders have struck. At the Communion on Sunday, the 6th inst., only one of the old lot turned up at the tables, and assistance in dispersing the elements was obtained from other churches.

A young lady fishing at Amat, Ross-shire, a few weeks ago with a nine foot trout rod, had a remarkable haul. She had on only two flies. With one she hooked a salmon and with the other a sea-trout, and, after a severe struggle, landed both fish. The salmon weighed 11½ lbs. and the trout 1 lb.

At a recent meeting of the London School Board it was announced that Mr. Conybeare, M. P., in consequence of his conviction under the Crimes Act, had ceased to be a member of the board. Mr. Conybeare essayed to address the members several times, but was ruled out of order. After a scene of considerable excitement he was allowed to make a speech "in his private capacity," and the debate was adjourned.

The jam-making industry in Kent is making rapid strides. As an instance of this it might be mentioned that three years ago a jam factory was established near Sittingbourne, and during the season which has just ended over a thousand tons of fruit were converted into jams. This doubles last year's output from the same establishment.

The sewage settling basin at the disposal works of the city of Southampton, Eng., which has a capacity of about 811,000 cubic feet, has been divided into two parts, thus enabling a continuous treatment, one basin being emptied while the other is filling. The precipitated matter is led, through pipes, to a mixing chamber, where it is mixed with the street sweepings by means of machinery, and is finally sold as fertilizing material. The city's garbage is burnt in what is known as a "destructor."

The Whitehaven Board of Guardians has decided by ten votes to nine that "the boys in the workhouse school be taught shorthand." The discussion that arose on the resolution was entertaining. One member, Mr. Braithwaite, did not approve of the proposal fearing that they would be asked to introduce music masters and pianos next. Mr. Musgrave, another member, confessed that he had tried his hand at shorthand; he had learned to write it, but could never learn to read it. Amid laughter he added that "many of the ratepayers could not write longhand, let alone shorthand, and yet they had to pay the rates."

Some interesting experiments were carried out a short time ago at Aberdare South Wales, to test the practicability of firing dynamite shells from ordinary cannon. The gun used was a 6-inch rifle-barrelled breechloading one, and the shells were 92 pounds weight, the actual charge of dynamite being 19 pounds. The target was strongly constructed of steel ship armoured plates 5 inches in thickness, with a very substantial backing of stout oak. The shell completely demolished the structure, tearing away the plates in a most sensational manner.

Rev. Mr. Murdoch, Free Church, Ayr, in the course of a recent sermon, took occasion to refer to slanders which, he alleged, some of his congregation and other persons were circulating about him. He said that

men who could outwardly act towards him as friends and sit under his ministrations, while at the same time they were slandering his character, were no better than whitened sepulchres, and he warned them that if the slanders were continued, he would no longer act the part of a minister to them, but assert his right as a private gentleman. While they might criticise his sermons as they liked, he would not submit to his character being assailed.

How to Be Attractive.

The world of women, says "Selene" in the Baltimore American, pays too much heed to its, looking-glass—the more physical beauty is gazed upon and thought of to the neglect of all else, because there is a popular belief abroad that only beautiful women are attractive. Women who are plain beyond all possibility of ever becoming handsome still devote their time to their personal adornment, under the impression that by so doing they will become better looking and more charming, when in reality if they would turn their backs upon their mirrors they might indeed far outshine the beautiful women around them. If they would devote the time they now waste in vain endeavors for physical improvement to cultivating their minds, improving their manners and conversation, they would find, like the maiden of the fairy tale, that the mirror was "a delusion and a snare."

The most attractive women in society today are not the acknowledged beauties in many instances. Often we see the homeliest girl in an assemblage the recipient of the most favors, because of her bright manners, her brilliant conversation or her keen wit. Such a one reigns supreme when the insipid beauty of the season is no longer admired. Beauty is of itself attractive; it pleases the eye and charms the beholder for a while, but beauty alone will not make a woman popular.

Women are much like flowers; the ones that have beauty and mind, well cultivated, are like the flowers with beauty and fragrance—they are never-ending sources of delight. Others are fair to look upon, but a close inspection discovers a thorn. The third kind are like the homely wall flower, neither handsome or graceful, but so full of sweetness that to be near them is joy inexpressible. So many girls, who are brought up with the knowledge that they are gifted with forms and faces of unusual loveliness, depend too much upon these advantages for their success in life. They never realize the necessity of applying themselves to the acquisition of knowledge; they grow to womanhood with meagre educations, no accomplishments, and a much exaggerated opinion of their charms. The result is that they enjoy only for a brief time the prestige for which they are so ambitious.

Some of the plainest women I ever knew were the greatest favorites. Their presence in a room was the signal for good-humored enjoyment. Time never flagged when they were of the party. The lack of mere facial symmetry was forgotten when under the spell of their genial influence. It is not unusual to see a handsome man wedded to a homely woman. We have all heard, and, perhaps, made the remark, "Why, what did such a good-looking man ever see in that woman to love?" We are thinking of only the outward appearance, when, in truth, the character of such a woman may be so lovely and attractive to those who know her that none would have her different if they could. It is a great pity when a girl allows herself to grow discontented and unhappy about her looks. When this is the case it is time for her to heed the fairy's warning and appear before the mirror by thinking less of appearance and more of other things.

A Remarkable Dog.

"That's a good dog you have there," said one travelling man to another.

"Very good, indeed."

"Ratler?"

"Well, he isn't much on rats, but he's a great race dog."

"A race dog?"

"Yes, sir. He can come out ahead of a rat at any distance."

Had Been There Before.

Dick Turner, an aged colored gentleman well known about Toronto, whose profession is that of a whitewasher, appeared before Colonel Denton the other day, charged with drunkenness and acknowledged the corn with a deep blush.

"Were you ever here before, Turner?"

"Yes, sah, but not fo bein' drunk."

"Well, what then?"

"Chickens."

"Discharged." (Laughter.)

Not P. ide, but Caution.

"Sweet Girl—" Mother, Mr. Nicolfellow is coming to take me out riding this afternoon. I may go, mayn't I?"

"Mother—" If he drives up with a span of spirited horses you can go, but if he comes with that broken-down old nag he had last time you sha'n't."

"Why, mother, I didn't suppose you would ever have such foolish pride."

"My dear, a young man who comes with a pair of spirited horses expects to drive with both hands."

He Wanted a Fall and Winter Humorist.

Seedy-looking individual (to managing editor)—I'd like to get employment as humorist on your paper.

Editor—Where are you from?

I am from Florida, the land of perpetual summer, where I have worked on leading papers.

You won't do. We want a Fall and Winter humorist who has had some experience with toboggan and coal dealer jokes. Come around next July when the ice-cream and summer resort chestnuts are unpacked and we may be able to do something for you.

How it Occurred.

Black (an expert stenographer): Say, Green the boy from the "Journal" office is here after the transcript of that temperance lecture. Is it most finished?

Green (a novice): All but a short sentence in about the middle of it, and I'll be hanged if I can make out from my notes what it is. Black: Just insert "great applause," and let it go.

Green acts upon suggestion, and the lecture is sent to the "Journal" office for publication with the doctored part reading: "Friends, I will detain you but a few moments longer." [Great applause.]