

PARDONED AT LAST.

A THRILLING CHRISTMAS STORY BY "JACK FROST."

ACT THE FOURTH.

Mrs. Peyton and her son were frequent visitors at Fairlawn, and none were more welcome than they.

Myrtle was a great favourite with her, and a close bond of union was being cemented between them in these peaceful days, which might stand the strain of dark onset.

Erie had a long conversation with Mr. Dene when he pleaded for Myrtle's hand in marriage.

"My daughter is very young yet—a mere child, in fact, and you too have not seen many summers of your life," he said, gravely. "Hasty love-matches do not, as a rule, turn out well. I have no desire to thwart Myrtle's inclinations; I like you, and have no doubt you would make her an excellent husband."

"Then you permit our engagement?" Erie answered, eagerly.

"Yes, under certain conditions; that you obtain your father's consent;—that gained, that the marriage does not take place till Myrtle is twenty-two years of age (she is twenty now), and not even then, if certain matters in my past life are not satisfactorily cleared up."

"Myrtle said something to me about my bearing a close resemblance to an enemy of yours. Do your conditions refer to that?" Erie asked sadly.

"No; it is clear that you are not related to that man," Dene answered, readily. "I refer to some great wrong done to myself—an injustice it is impossible I can explain at the present moment."

"I am glad to hear you say that, sir. As regards my father, we expect him home shortly, when I am sure of gaining his consent; he has only to see Myrtle to love her as a daughter."

"I trust the love you profess for my child will stand the test of time," Dene said, gently; "strange and startling changes sometimes happen in this life."

"Nothing could change my deep affection for Myrtle; it would kill me if I lost her," he protested, warmly.

"I am content," Dene said, with a sigh. "May Heaven shield and protect you both, is my earnest prayer."

Erie Peyton was satisfied, and hastened to tell the good news to Myrtle, and henceforth they looked on each other as affianced man and wife.

At their period of life love was one continual poem; something fresh and new was inscribed on its pages daily—nay hourly.

The thoughts of each heart were pure, unadulterated; no dark places were there—no spot which need be hidden from the searching gaze of the other.

The struggles, trials and difficulties of life had not touched them as yet; love's bark rode on a calm sea in unbroken sunlight.

"Twas a something to think of, to look back upon in after life—this perfect union of two hearts, with only one absorbing thought between them; it was an earthly Heaven, such as Paradise must have been before the Fall.

It brought a secret joy to Mr. Dene's heart to see the tranquil content of the one being earth held for him. He was so laden for years of misery, of cruel punishment and torture; it seemed as if his evil genius was tired of persecuting him, and fled before the guileless, unselfish love of parent and child.

Those dark, brooding thoughts of vengeance, which had haunted him—been his constant companions for years—were slowly fading from his mind, to be replaced by others, better, holier.

Miss Becky Pride saw all this, and was not too pleased; her ambitious schemes were thwarted, and she had serious thoughts of retiring from the contest by leaving his service, when something happened to give her fresh hope.

Myrtle and her father had gone to a party, leaving her at home, as she pleaded indisposition. An unusual thing for him, he left his keys on the drawing-room table, being rather hurried in getting away. She pounced upon them with secret joy, and triumph; she could now penetrate to Blue Beard's chamber, and discover something of importance. She was sure she kept all his important correspondence there, and she hoped to discover its hiding-place.

Armed with a candle and matches, she stole out, and having tried the door till she found the right key, unlocked it, and entered.

Lighting the candle, she looked around, and was rather disappointed to find it all so commonplace. She saw the glass jars, but wisely resolved not to meddle with them, and was right, for they contained deadly poisons.

The curtain next attracted her attention and drawing it aside, she started on seeing that waxen face. Its resemblance to Erie Peyton struck her instantly, as did also the peculiar V-shape mark on the left cheek.

"This, then, is his enemy, the Duke of Brittany," she said to herself. "I would know him if I saw him among a thousand. Strange that Mr. Dene should keep such a memento here. I am sure there is some dark secret connected with his life. If I can only find the hiding-place of his letters I may learn what that secret is."

She espied an escritoire, which she was not long in unlocking.

A novice in the art of ransacking drawers would have left traces of his or her handiwork behind. Not so; each packet was locked over, and put back exactly as before.

A book of MS. proved a rich prize; it was headed "My Diary." At first she thought of reading it there; but the spot was too sensitive for one possessed of such delicate sensitive nerves as hers. Concealing the precious treasure in her pocket, she tried to open the door, but failed.

Mr. Dene alone knew the secret of the lock, and the hiding-place of his letters I may learn what that secret is."

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It occurred to her that her immunity from disgrace would consist in mastering the contents of the diary, which, if it contained any secrets, would enable her to defy him.

But the effort to read was fruitless; the words swam before her eyes like phantoms, and she closed the book with a little cry of despair. What was she to do—how to act? If she shouted ever so for help, her cries would not be heard. To pass a whole night alone in this room would drive her mad—turn her hair grey.

Such a mortal terror had seized upon her that when she rose from her chair, her limbs refused to support her, and she stumbled heavily against the wall which partitioned the study from the billiard room.

Something seemed to fly open suddenly, and when she recovered consciousness, she found herself lying in an open doorway. She had fallen against the spring of a secret door, which Mr. Dene, for some purpose best known to himself, had had made there.

All her courage came back to her now. Taking up the candle, and closing the secret door, she hastened up to the drawing-room, eager to begin perusing the diary.

Drinking some wine to steady her nerves, she seated herself in a cosy armchair, and after adjusting the reading-lamp, began to read.

So absorbed was she that the hours sped by, and still found her engaged in the task. The ormolu clock on the marble mantle-shelf chimed the hour of midnight.

"It will be three before they are home," she murmured. "I think I shall be mistress of Fairlawn House after all."

Another hour passed, and still her absorption continued; what she read had a terrible fascination for her. About this time she thought she detected a stealthy footstep in the room, but put it down to nervousness, and read on.

"At last!" she murmured, as she closed the book. "I know all, and mean to use my power skillfully."

The next moment she was held down in her chair, and a handkerchief placed over her nose and mouth until she became insensible. 'Twas the work of a burglar, who wore a rapé mask.

"Cleverly done," he muttered, and thereupon commenced to clear the room of everything valuable and portable, not forgetting Miss Becky's portmanteau, which he took from her pocket, along with another chain. "She's safe enough for another hour," he chuckled. "This will be a good night's work for me; couldn't find a better crib to crack from here to John O'Groats. Here's another sack-load of swag, matey," he said, handing it through the gate abutting on the river, "and here's some prime stuff to swig. I'm off for another lot."

"Better be satisfied, Jack," said a woman's voice from the boat; "them river police might spot us, or the family come back atop of you."

"I'll chance it," was the gruff reply. "If you hear a disturbance, row away like mad; I'll escape by the road."

"Hilloa, my man, who are you, and what do you want here?" said Erie Peyton, who, with his mother, had just returned in Dene's carriage.

The burglar's answer was to aim a terrific blow at his head with a life-preserver, which Erie warmed off with his right arm.

The arm fell helplessly at his side; but before he could repeat the blow, Mr. Dene had him by the throat in a grip of iron, from which he could not shake himself free.

Myrtle and Mrs. Peyton screamed in chorus, as well they might, and a posse of alarmed servants were quickly on the spot, to whom Mr. Dene handed over the half-strangled burglar.

Poor Erie Peyton was assisted to the drawing-room, and a doctor sent for in haste.

Miss Becky Pride was found in an insensible condition, and lying at her feet was the purloined diary.

Myrtle picked it up mechanically; but on recognizing her father's handwriting, placed it hastily in her pocket.

Meanwhile, the burglar had been placed in a room to await the coming of the police.

"Wants to see me, Manvers?" said Mr. Dene, when the butler delivered the burglar's message.

"Yes, sir; says it's important. It will be too late when the police arrives."

"Perhaps he wants to give up what he has stolen," Dene remarked. "I will see him."

"Now, my man, what is it?" he asked, sternly, on entering the room.

"Is anyone listening, sir?" said the fellow.

"No! you can speak out; but be quick."

"I'm Jack Skinner, sir. My missus brought up your daughter, Miss Myrtle," he said, with a whine. "But it isn't for that I asked you to come. When you took her away from us a gent came to ask about her; he had three moles on his cheek, like the letter V."

"Good Heavens!" Mr. Dene exclaimed, thrown off his guard for the moment.

"We met him again, sir, only to day—Heaven's truth, we did, sir; and he wanted to know where you were, very bad. We wouldn't tell him, sir, no fear! Without first seeing you, I took a drop too much to drink, sir, and forgot myself. Don't look me up—please don't, for Miss Myrtle's sake! We was as kind as poor folk could be to her, sir, all those years."

"I am afraid I can't help you; you have been guilty of violence, as well as robbery," he returned, severely.

"It was only a tap on the arm, sir; if the young gent will soon get over that. If you just cut these cords, I can get out through the windows, and no one can say you helped me. If I'm had up before the beak, I must tell everything."

Bertram Dene winced at this veiled threat. Publicity was what he most dreaded at this crisis in his affairs, for Myrtle's sake as well as his own.

In a few minutes he had freed the wretch from the cords, saying:

"You must leave England to-morrow. I will find the money. Where can I meet you?"

"At the Falham side of Putney Bridge."

"At what hour?"

"Twelve o'clock in the day."

"I'll be there."

At the door Mr. Dene turned, and said, in a loud voice:

"I regret your position, my man; but"

cannot help you. The law must take its course."

He locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

When the police arrived their prisoner had flown, and though a strict search was made of the grounds, no trace of him was found.

The police investigated the affair of the burglary next morning, and traced heavy footsteps in the direction of the river; but here the clue failed.

Miss Becky could give no information whatever about the affair, except that she was attacked suddenly, and quickly rendered insensible.

Naturally the matter made a great stir, especially when it became known that the burglar had assaulted young Mr. Peyton.

Mr. Dene took the affair very quietly, and made light of the robbery, but he was not so satisfied away, and trusted he would never meet him again in life. Publicity had been avoided, and to him that fact was of incalculable service.

But he was soon to be confronted by another danger from an unexpected quarter. He missed his keys, which Becky had kept in her pocket, thinking that she would be able to put back the diary before he returned. But Skinner's unexpected attack had rendered that impossible.

"Have you seen my keys, Myrtle?" he asked, anxiously, the second morning following the burglary.

"No, papa, have you lost them?"

"Yes! I wouldn't care so much if the bunch did not contain the keys of my study. I must ask the servants about them."

Poor Myrtle had been so upset by recent events that she had quite forgotten the fact of picking up the diary in the drawing-room at Miss Pride's feet. Her lover's state, though not critical, was sufficiently grave, too, to cause her anxiety. She had to receive visitors, anxious and curious about the recent events, and to answer numerous letters of condolence and inquiry. But the keys brought the circumstance to her recollection, and she said:

"Have you missed any of your private papers or books, papa?"

"I cannot tell what is missing until I find my keys," he said, fretfully. "These constant upsets are really too bad."

"Wait a minute!" she replied, with a strange expression, as a light began to dawn upon her. "I think I know where your keys are." Going straight to Becky's room, she said, quietly: "Did you find a bunch of keys?—papa has missed his."

A guilty flush came into her face, as she answered:

"Yes, I put them in my pocket; they were on the drawing-room table, dear."

"Thanks," said Myrtle, somewhat coldly, and returned to her father, to whom she gave the keys, saying, "Miss Pride found them, papa."

"I am very much obliged to her, I'm sure," he remarked, greatly relieved, and would have dismissed the incident from his mind if Myrtle had not said, as she placed the diary in his hand, "That is yours, papa—is it not?"

He flushed, and then turned as white as marble, on recognizing the book.

"I found it in the drawing room, lying at Miss Pride's feet on the night of the burglary," she continued, speaking very gravely. "She must have been reading it."

He nodded, for his rage was too great to find vent in words; every secret of his life was laid bare to a designing woman—a traitress—who, by this time knew that he was an escaped convict.

The same relentless fate that had sent him to Siberia still pursued him implacably—ruthlessly.

Was he never to find rest or peace? Was he to be hunted like a wild beast, and find no haven where he could hide until his innocence was made clear?

Myrtle read all this in the workings of his face, and if she ever hated a woman it was Becky Pride.

Laying her hand gently on his arm, she said, in accents of tender solicitude:

"Papa, you appear vexed—grieved. Is there anything compromising in that book?"

"Yes—it tells of my being an escaped convict!" he moaned, a piteous look in his eyes that cut her to the heart.

"Dify her—charge her with her treachery—with theft! Your name is not to it, surely; and even if it is, you can tell her that it was only the outline of a plot you had written for a novel. If you will permit me, I will dismiss her on the instant."

"She has suspected something for some time past; the story she told us, as related by Lady Rose, proves that much. If I disclose her, I cannot muzzle her tongue, child. The Duke would hear of it, and frustrate all the plans I have weaved to establish my innocence."

"Why should you fear that man, papa?"

"Tis he who ought to tremble, to think that you have escaped—that you are alive to track him down—to exact a terrible vengeance for all the wrongs he has inflicted upon your innocent head. Oh, that I were a man, instead of a weak woman! I would soon force him to do you justice. As for this woman, she must and shall be crushed!"

"I do not fear him because of any further injury he could inflict upon me. My liberty is not in jeopardy. In England I am, and can remain, a free man—there is no extradition treaty for such a case as mine; but I do tremble lest he should learn of your existence. Already he has been trying to discover you."

"Who told you that?" she asked, eagerly.

"Skinner—the man who committed the burglary," he answered; "he said that only the previous day the Duke recognized him and wanted your address and mine. 'Twas to prevent him gaining the information that I let the burglar escape, and gave him a large sum of money next day to frank him and his wife to America."

"The Duke, black-hearted and unscrupulous as he is, dare not molest me, papa. The whole of England—all the civilized world—would hound him down if he dared to hurt even a hair of my head," she said, with ringing defiance in her voice.

He is too cunning to attempt anything openly, my child, and I am too wary to invite attack. I am rich enough to bribe Miss Pride to keep silent. Patience gained me my liberty; thine I attempted to escape, was caught, flogged, chained—almost starved; but my goalers could not break my spirit or crush my resolution, and to day I stand here, a free man."

"It is cruel to have to submit tamely," she sighed, her proud nature rebelling at the mere thought of that woman having the power to injure them.

"Bitterly cruel, I admit; but our war will come, child—endurance now leads to future victory," he said, kissing her forehead tenderly

with deep admiration shining in his eyes at her noble courage.

"May I speak to her on the matter? I promise to be prudent, not to let one angry word—a single reproach—escape me. Perhaps she will give me some insight into her motive, and prepare you to come to some arrangement."

"Yes; I will trust you, Myrtle, with this delicate negotiation. You have shown a self-possession—a tact—far beyond your years. Make her no offer—do not even hint at such a thing; merely probe her purpose, if possible."

Myrtle nodded, and hastened to fight out this battle, woman to woman. The fair fame of her noble father was at stake, and for it she would fight like a tigress robbed of its young.

Miss Pride lay on the couch in her room, a prey, not to remorse, but fear.

She had eaten the bread and salt of these people, had been treated loyally, generously, as a friend—not a dependant; yet she thought not of the treachery she had been guilty of.

She was self-willed—and wanted to make Mr. Dene wed her, not from love, but fear. She expected a visit from him; but instead Myrtle came, her face showing no index of the passion that was consuming her.

"Papa thanks you for taking such care of his keys," she said, with a smile; "he has a lot of valuables in his study. What a blessing the burglar did not find them!"

Miss Becky gave her a searching glance; but she did not flinch under it. It was woman to woman—cunning opposed to craft. "I am so pleased I have been of service to him, dear," she purred. "Sometimes one hides away things they would not let others see for the world."

"Papa has no secrets from me that I am aware of," Myrtle replied, softly. "Even if anyone had ventured into his study their search would not have availed them much."

"Perhaps not, dear; he knows best," she said, looking Myrtle straight in the eyes.

"Of course; I have seen everything—even to the face in the corner; did you, Miss Pride?"

"—Surely you don't think I would be guilty of such conduct, Miss Dene?"

"We don't merely think—we are sure you entered the room," remarked Myrtle, pleasantly. "He is not a bit angry, only amused at your curiosity. You found it a Blue Beard's chamber, perhaps?"

"I tell you, I did not—"

"Come, dear, there's no occasion to fence with the matter. I found a book lying at your feet, entitled 'My Diary.' I hope you found it amusing reading?"

Finding further prevarication useless, Becky Pride said, significantly:

"It was the story of a life."

"Exactly; but not papa's. He is amusing himself by writing a novel which, for thrilling interest, will astonish the readers of fiction; would you object to acting as his amanuensis?"

"I have a perfect right to put my own construction on the matter," she said, shifting her eyes uneasily under Myrtle's keen gaze.

"But why should you not accept my definition, dear Miss Pride?" Myrtle asked, mockingly. "Surely, you can have no ulterior motive in view?"

"I decline to discuss the matter further now, Miss Dene," she said, snappishly. "If Mr. Dene will favour me with a private interview, I will gratify him with my opinions. I think he will, in his own interest."

"Certainly there can be no great danger in his granting that, Miss Pride—he is not easily captivated or intimidated. I will tell him of your wish," said Myrtle, with playful irony, as she left the apartment.

To herself she almost hissed, "Viper that we have warmed in our bosom, how I detest, scorn you! You are too contemptible for hate even! We shall see who wins—you or I!"

The most magnificent house in Paris was that of Charles, Duke of Brittany. It was a palatial and elegant mansion in the Rue de Lille, with a noble garden, groves of forest trees, and a wide expanse of lawn in its rear.

Furnished regardless of expense, it stood out premier among the many luxurious homes of that period. The dual arms figured above the portico, and the dual crest was emblazoned on everything, bespeaking pride of ancestry as well as lavish display.

The duke was well known in political as well as fashionable circles, and as well disliked. He was a creature of intrigue, of unbridled passion and stubborn pride, possessed, too, of an inflexible, unyielding will.

He was seated in the grand salon, filled with objects of virtu—pictures, vases, priceless porcelain and innumerable treasures from every clime—reading the *Monteuze* in irreproachable dress—an Adams of fifty summers.

A servant presented a card on a gold salver, bowing low and obsequiously, as if approaching a deity.

"Pierre Verlon, Notary, Paris," was inscribed on the card.

"Show him in here," was the haughty response, accompanied by a dignified wave of a hand on which rare gems glistened.

Enter Pierre Verlon in rusty black; a stooping figure, bristling grey eyebrows surmounting eyes of piercing blackness—not by any means a person in keeping with the refined surroundings of the apartment, but a man of parts for all that.

"Monsieur, your pleasure?" said the duke, hardly deigning to look up from his paper.

"It is important enough for you to put down your paper and attend to it, monsieur," was the calm reply.

"You are uncouth," was the disdainful reply.

"But a lover of truth; one who holds your honour and fame in his hands," was the bold reply.

"My lacquers shall show you the door," was the angry retort.

"What matters?" came cool reply, accompanied by a shrug. "All Paris shall ring with the perfidy of the noble Duke of Brittany."

"You dare this?"

"Yes—your victim, the husband of your sister, has escaped from Siberia, and his child lives and is with him."

"Tis false!" hisses the duke.

"You only believe what suits you, monsieur. I tell you truths."

"Well, what of that?—he is still a criminal," was the sneering reply.

"Not so—a martyr, and you know it. Don't knit your brows; I care naught for your anger, a Frenchman is not fallen so low as to feel even a perjured duke. Be calm—the lies which you unborn ears know

to me, and have confessed. You see I am armed with facts; you have only the memory of past misdeeds to support you."

"Did he send you here?"

"I wanted no sending. I am his friend, I protected his child, and I, noble duke, mean to stand by him to the end."

"He wants money," the duke sneered.

"Pish! he is almost as rich as you, and will be wealthier when he wrings from you his wife's fortune. If you are wise you will conciliate him, not defy."

"What is it you want?" he asked, grinding his teeth with impotent rage.

"A written confession of his innocence."

"That he shall never receive from me," he cried, revengefully.

"As you please, I give you an opportunity of hushing this grave scandal up. It may transpire that you not only employed false witnesses to swear away his life, but kidnapped his wife, murdered her perhaps," said the notary, with imperturbable calmness of manner and speech, and keeping his eyes fixed on his face.

Every drop of blood left the duke's face, which became the colour of marble, and for the moment the notary thought he was dying.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Carving the Christmas Turkey.

If the family be small and the turkey is to be served for a second dinner, carve only from the side nearest you. Then the turkey will be left with one-half entire, and if placed in a clean platter with the cut side nearest the carver and garnished with parsley, will present nearly as fine an appearance to all but the carver as when first served.

The second or third serving of a turkey depends very much upon the care taken in putting it away. Do not, as is so often done, leave it on the platter just as it came from the table, but put the crumbs of stuffing back into the body, put the slices of cut meat together and cover them with the skin to protect them from the air so they will not become hard. Should there be nothing left, apparently, but the bones, do not let them become dry by being exposed to the air, but scrape off every particle of the meat and stuffing at once. Cover the meat until you are ready to use it, and put the bones on to boil for soup or gravy. Often from a seemingly bare carcass enough may be obtained to make a savory dish of scalloped meat sufficient for another meal.

An essential aid to easy carving, and one often overlooked, is that the platter be large enough to hold the portions of meat as they are carved, as well as the whole fowl. The persistency with which some housekeepers cling to a small dish for fear the fowl will look lost on a larger one, often makes successful carving impossible, and inward disgust abundant. The platter should be placed near the carver that he may easily reach any part of the fowl without turning the fowl round. The carver may stand or sit as suits his convenience.

A very important matter is the quality and condition of the knife. It should be made from the best steel, and have a narrow, than pointed blade, and a handle easy to grasp, and be of a size adapted to the article to be carved and to the person using it. Be as particular to keep it sharp as to have it bright and clean, and never allow it to be used to cut bread or for any other than its legitimate purpose. There should be a crook or guard on the end of the handle to enable the carver to grasp it more securely and use all the strength necessary. The handle should be long enough to reach from the tip of the fore finger to an inch beyond the back side of the hand, so that the edge of the hand, about an inch above the wrist, rests against the handle of the knife. In dividing a difficult joint the manipulations should be made, not by turning the hand, but by turning the knife with the fingers. In this way the position of the point of the blade can be more easily changed as the joint may require.

The fork should have two slender, curving tines about three-eighths of an inch apart and two and one-half inches long, and should have a guard.

Woman and the Franchise.

New York Star: Miss Kate Field has written an article upon women as politicians, in which she denounces them as unpractical and unfit for the management of affairs. "Hysterical sentimentalists," she calls them, who thus far in our history have exerted a baleful influence upon politics. This attack, coming in the same week that the graduates in the normal school protested against the appointment of two women as school commissioners, is, to say the least, startling. These facts do not show much, perhaps, except that the woman suffragists who clamor so loudly for equal rights wish mankind only represent themselves. Womanhood is pretty well satisfied with her sphere as it is now arranged, and all she asks for is that more avenues of industry shall be opened for such of her sisters as are in need. The right to vote, to attend caucuses and to hold office are the last boon that the intelligent woman wants. Woman will settle the question herself in the quiet but effective way that she settles everything, and will end by getting just what she wants.

A Finished Artist.

Wife—John, you're drunk again!
Hubby—No, m' dear, only rehearsal!
I'm going on amateur stage ash drunken man, zhat's all.
Wife—Well, John, you don't want to waste your talents on an amateur stage any longer. You want to seek a professional engagement at once.

The Weight of the Wicked.

Coal Dealer—I have investigated your complaint and find you got your full ton of coal. That's the way it is.
Customer—Are you really sure that there are no two weights about it.

The Race is Sometimes to the Strong.

"That rival of yours seems to be in a fair way to cut you out. He's a pretty athletic fellow. Are you not afraid of him?"
"I Oa no; but her father is, so he has a better snow than I have."

New in the Business.

Old Lady—"Do you keep balsam of fir, young man?"
New Drug Clerk—"No, ma'am, the fur store is two doors down the street."

Purifies the Breath, and Preserves the Teeth Adams' Tutti Frutti Gum. Sold by all druggists and confectioners. 5 cents.