

PARDONED AT LAST.

A THRILLING CHRISTMAS STORY, BY "JACK FROST."

ACT THE FOURTH.—(CONTINUED.)

Rising he approached a bell to summon assistance, but the duke waved him back, saying hoarsely:

"Be seated; if you were worth it I would challenge you and shoot you like a dog for your insults."

"Murder may be in your line," was the biting retort. "I am content to fight you with ordinary weapons, those the law provide; remember your whole life will be probed, your every secret laid bare; be warned before it is too late!"

"Why does not he face me?" he almost hissed.

"Not because he lacks courage, duke. A man who could live in Siberian captivity for seventeen years, and suffer, though innocent, is no coward. He is in my hands—if to-morrow he met you, 'would be your life or his.'"

"This is intimidation!"

"Place any construction you like on my words. Will you accede to my demand?"

"No, a thousand times no. I hate him still, the base born hound; he dared to think his ignoble blood good enough to mix with that of my house. Curse him!" and the speaker foamed at the mouth, so intense was his wrath.

At last he had met a foeman worthy of his steel, a man who could give him thrust for thrust, and strike home.

"Tis a matter of justice, not ancestry, duke. I think, if you trace back his ancestry, you will find it as noble as yours. The first Duke of Brittany married a farmer's daughter, one of the bourgeoisie."

If a look could have stricken the bold notary dead, such would have been his doom at that moment.

"Has no member of your ducal house ever committed that unpardonable crime of mesalliance?" Pierre Verlon continued.

"You, my noble duke, can best answer that question."

"Fie, you go too far," he said, hoarsely.

"I will go even further in a court of justice. Do you think I am ignorant of your antecedents? I know all your secret marriage to an English woman, your intrigues. You would do well not to defy me."

"Go, lest I be tempted to do you a mischief. Go!"

"When I come into a wolf's den, I carry arms," was the quiet retort. "I go, but when I think of it, you will receive a citation to appear before the courts. Adieu monsieur, and permit me to subscribe myself your very obedient, humble, servant," he said, as he bowed cynically and left the presence of the man he had tortured.

"Am I fallen so low as to be thus insulted in my own mansion?" gasped the infuriated man.

"He shall smart for this—he little knows whom he is defying!"

Sounding a silver bell, he said to the servant who answered his summons:

"Send Dupont to me instantly!"

Whilst waiting his coming, the duke paced the apartment with a quick, panther-like stride, as if he were preparing to make a strike.

"I care not for the law. He dared to ally himself to my family, one of the most ancient in France, by stealth! Are princes nothing? must they be judged like the common herd? He has felt my talons already, next time they shall pierce his skulking heart," he muttered, angrily.

"This notary is the most dangerous of the two, and might be silenced. Her child is living; well, she shall be abducted, her plebeian father will be stabbed in his very heart's affections through her."

The workings of his face were something terrible—concentrated hate, malice, revenge, all converged there. Charles, Duke of Brittany, evidently inherited all the bitter black blood that flowed in the veins of his ancestors.

The look of Satanic hate thereon depicted was enhanced by the V-shaped mark—each mole stood out distinct, as if embossed, of a blood-red colour, and the veins of his neck swelled till they looked like veiled whips.

His dark piercing eyes glowed and scintillated like those of a venomous serpent, and his stiff, iron-grey hair seemed to bristle like the spines of a wild boar when preparing for a deadly rush.

Pride and greed made him the man he was, or rather transformed him from a man into a fiend. 'Twas no wonder that Myrtle's father feared as well as hated him mortally, more on account of her sake than his own.

Perhaps, after all, it would have been better if the notary had not braved this wolf in his own lair, for in doing so he had goaded him to desperation.

'Twas hardly twenty years of assured victory, to learn that his victim had escaped from the meshes of the deadly net he had thrown about him, and was free to attack him in return—that there was some one living too, who could, and meant to, claim his sister's colossal fortune.

It must be a death struggle now, a final battle meaning annihilation to one of the foemen.

The Duke had shown no mercy to his sister, the offspring of the same mother, who had shared his childhood's sports, and had been ever gentle and loving to him.

Was it likely, now that years had hardened his heart, he would relent and spare Myrtle?

"Dupont, why have you delayed attending my summons?" the duke asked fiercely, glad to find someone on whom to vent his rage.

"A messenger has just arrived from England, your grace," said the man quietly; these exhibitions of temper on the part of his master were of too frequent occurrence to upset his equanimity.

"Well, another Will-a-the-Wisp affair, I suppose?" was the acrimonious retort.

"No your grace, she was traced to Rocky Head, a village on the English coast, and from thence to London—here is a photograph of a girl—it resembles her closely," said Dupont, handing it to him.

"The likeness is a marvellous one, certainly," muttered the duke, eyeing Myrtle's sun picture, critically, and rapidly regaining composure, now that this news told him the time for action had arrived. "Whose child is she?"

"She was brought up by a fisherman and his wife at first; but two years ago she was claimed by her father, your grace."

"And he is?"

"Kear Jacques Rouge could not discover," said Dupont, with a sigh; "the fisherman

had left the place, and was traced to London, but on going to Chelsea, Jacques found him gone, no one knew whither."

"I leave for England to-night, Dupont."

"The man bowed with deep respect; these hurried journeys caused him no surprise."

"You will not accompany me, nor do I need Jacques at present. You will both be better employed in looking after this fellow, one Pierre Verlon, a notary—this is his card."

"You want information, your grace?"

"More! I must have his private papers, and if this Pierre Verlon was to be suddenly missed, I would be pleased. Spare no money in accomplishing this object, Dupont. I have few secrets from you. My sister's husband has escaped from Siberia, and is in England."

"This is sad, your grace; they may meet."

"Yes, if I delay much longer it may be too late. This photograph will be of great service to me. Remember the notary—this time there must be no bungling. Each blow that I strike must go straight home."

"Consider the notary removed from your grace's path—but, oh, my dear master, don't be offended if I speak a word of warning. You are going to England to meet that man; beware of his vengeance. Remember what he said after he was condemned—he would live to be revenged," the old man pleaded earnestly with tears in his eyes.

"Tush! I do not fear him, Dupont; age is unerring you," said his master, contemptuously.

"I have grown grey in the service of your grace's family, have nursed you, watched you grow up, and now you tell me to remain behind when danger threatens you. As we grow old and we get near the confines of the other world as I am, Heaven vouchsafes us warnings denied to younger people. I am troubled about your grace—give up this journey, or let me go with you, to watch you, to guard you."

And going on his knees, the old man seized his hands supplicatingly.

"Rise, Dupont; it would take more than a dream to bar my purposes. He sent that notary to threaten me; the witnesses in his trial are ready to swear I bribed them; his innocence will be established on the foundation of my disgrace. Marie's fortune will be wrested from me, and the worst construction put on my conduct: it will be said I placed her in a convent because I coveted her money and gave out a report of her death. I am going into the enemy's camp to strike a blow for dear life's sake."

"Would that you had a son to aid you, some one to guard the honour and safety of the house of Brittany," the old man said, with a grievous sigh.

"I have a son, my faithful old friend; 'tis for him I have been fighting all these years," the duke said, exultingly—"a noble youth whom I love dearer than life."

"Thank Heaven!" was fervently ejaculated; "my old eyes will close in peace now."

"You shall see him, Dupont; I will bring him back with me when I have crushed this canaille. I hated my sister's paramour (I shall never acknowledge the sacred tie between them openly) from the first, and now I feel that the same earth cannot contain us both. Marie will find that I can be implacable; her escape only makes me the more bitter against him."

"Have patience with me, master," pleaded the old man; "this family feud could be healed. May I speak?"

The duke gave a gesture of assent.

"Her child lives—the photograph is a speaking witness to that; you have a son—a marriage. Oh, your Grace, do not be so angry, do not knit your brows; a blood feud is hateful to Heaven! Let the dead past bury its dead in the happiness of the living."

"If I did not esteem you so highly, Dupont, I could be more than angry. No son of mine could ever love their child; he can and will learn to hate—deeper her. Now go; let everything be ready for my departure, and remember the notary."

Some little while later, the Duke of Brittany left the shores of France for England to carry on his merciless vendetta.

ACT THE FIFTH.

When Myrtle left Miss Pride, she went straight to her father, who was waiting her return in an agony of apprehension. He had guarded his dangerous secret so well, as he thought, only to find that it was discovered by means he never dreamt of.

He knew, as a man of the world, what that world would think of a returned convict flaunting in peacock's feathers, giving princely entertainments to men and women, who would, when they learnt the truth, resent it as a liberty—a lasting insult.

He would pose as an inspector, not a martyr; and poor Myrtle, who had endured so much in her earliest years, would share his disgrace. He had riches, it is true; but what would they avail him if human sympathy were wanting?

It was no wonder that Bertram looked with bitter anguish on the crisis that had overtaken him—a thunderbolt from out a summer sky. Myrtle urged defiance, because she lacked experience. She had not mingled with the world, nor did she know its laws, which, like those of the Medes and Persians, were unalterable. Be found out in anything discreditable, and good-bye to the good opinion of the world, especially a father's domain; and this he knew all too well.

It is not to be wondered at that while awaiting his daughter's return he should have worked himself up into a state of feverish excitement, which burst forth into one impetuous question on seeing her:

"Well?"

"She wishes to see you. My worst fears are verified, papa; she has earned your study, and knows all."

"Do you think she is mercenary, Myrtle?" he asked brokenly.

"Yes; but ambitious more than all. You must temperance, papa—play with her as you would with a fish: in her coaxing she will overreach herself. See her at once, before she has time to plot and scheme. Something tells me that we are on the eve of a crisis which we must surmount or be crushed."

"What have I done to be ever thus persecuted?" he groaned, falling into a chair, and covering his face with his hands. "Merciful Heaven! give me peace—peace!"

"Courage, darling papa!" she cried, uncovering his face and kissing him tenderly while her hand wandered among his hair, already plentifully sprinkled with snow. "I am at your side to console and aid you. They can point at me—call me the convict's daughter—soreen me; but make me ashamed of you, never!"

"I used to dream of you, my pet—my angel child!" he said, softly, a smile chasing away the sorrow which a moment before had been depicted there. "Often in the night, when only the sentry's heavy tread broke the silence, have I lain as in a trance, and you have come and kissed me and smiled, and placed your little hand in mine and called me father; then, for a time, all too brief, I forgot my chains, the lash of a heartless taskmaster, and wept for very joy. Pierre—my friend, my more than brother—used to send me letters about you; and when I knew you lived, and were well and strong, I used to sing in my lonely cell for very joy, while other prisoners wept or blasphemed. You have been my one lodestar, and are now my only joy. Oh, Myrtle! if I lost you I should go and kill myself!"

She let him talk on—this man, her noble father, who had consorted with felons for years—for she judged that it would relieve his overcharged heart, and calm his fevered brow.

She sat on his knee and drew his head down, and with sweet kisses, tender caresses, and loving words, soothed his troubled spirit, and mingled her tears with his. It was a touching picture—one that might have softened even the hardest heart.

He tapped at the door of Becky's sitting-room, and entered when she answered, "Come in."

She gave one swift glance at his face to read therein some angry of her chances of success; but that of a sphinx could not be more impassive than was his.

"You wish to see me, Miss Pride?" he said, quietly, as he seated himself.

"Your daughter broached a subject which I did not care to discuss with her, and concerns you alone," she said, falteringly at first, but gaining firmness as she proceeded.

He merely bowed assentingly; her perfidy had so stung him that he was afraid he might lose all control over his temper if he attempted to argue with her, or tell her that Myrtle was to be implicitly trusted with anything pertaining to his interests.

His silence somewhat disconcerted her. She was at a loss how to allude to her visit to his study—whether to plunge into it at once, or lead up to it gradually.

"Mr. Dene, I owe a duty to myself," she said, half-timidly. "My living, my very bread depends upon the respectability (pardon the term) of the family in which I am employed. For instance—"

"Please do not mince matters. I understand. No one would employ you if they knew you had been companion to the daughter of an escaped convict—a condemned felon. Is not that what you mean?"

"One cannot—especially in my dependent position—ignore the opinions or laws of society," she observed, glad that he had broken the ice for her; "nor, though you are rich, would you be visited or received into society if the truth were known. Mr. Dene, I may believe you innocent; but you have to convince the world of that, not me."

"In all you have said you are quite right," he assented. "May I ask if anyone first aroused your suspicions about my unhappy position?"

"No one, Mr. Dene. I myself saw there was a mystery from the very first. Your daughter's education had been woefully neglected. I can understand why. You yourself were never visited by even your neighbours; your very opulence was another thing, quite out of keeping with your daughter's untrained deportment and manners, especially when contrasted with your own polished manners. When I found your keys I could not resist the temptation of trying to solve the mystery. I succeeded, and now find that I am companion to the daughter of a convict—a by no means enviable position, you must admit!"

He was forced, so far, to admit the cogency of her arguments, and said, frankly:

"Miss Pride, I owe you a most humble apology. Believe me, I have every reason to hope that I will be able to establish my innocence. Society has no charms for me; 'twas for my daughter's sake alone that I remained in England. How can I compensate you for the unintentional wrong I inflicted upon you?"

"I honour your frankness, which stamps you as a gentleman," she said, with one of her wondrous seraphic smiles; "but, still, it is a dangerous secret for me to carry about in my breast. The crime for which you were condemned was a most heinous one—attempted murder or assassination, which, at the time (I remember it well), called upon its perpetrators the just reprobation of the whole civilized world. People would not expect to find one of the would-be assassins mixing in the first set in London."

He winced at these home thrusts, which, however, he could not rebut, and left very bitter against his enemy for having placed him in such a terrible position.

"I am compelled to bring all this before you, Mr. Dene, in self-defence; for I and I freely admit it—was guilty of a breach of trust; but you now see my dilemma and why I could not discuss so delicate a matter with Myrtle, a mere child. I am not only her companion, but her chaplain, and through me she has been admitted to the very *creme de la creme* of society. Nothing can compensate me for having been led into the position under what the world would term false pretences."

At this point she burst into tears, which greatly distressed and embarrassed him.

"My dear Miss Pride," he said, gently, "is there no way in which I can make amends for the injury you have sustained? I am rich, and anything in reason—"

"If anyone else but you had spoken such words to me, I would have taken them as a deadly insult," she said, with well-simulated indignation, and drying her tears. "There is no disgrace in earning money—even Royalty does that; but to accept a bribe of that sort would disgrace me for ever in my own eyes and yours. I could share the secret with you in one way, and in one only."

Her bosom heaved and fell fast—her breathing was labored, and her heart pulsed madly, for she had resound a crucial point—a few minutes would suffice either to give her a coveted position or mar her well-planned schemes for ever.

"How!—in what way?" he asked, dazed by her words, of the import of which his mind had a faint conception.

"By becoming your wife!" she answered, quietly. "I admire, respect you, and can quietly guard your dangerous secret by that position. I would be a mother to Myrtle, and a true friend to you. You stand on the edge of a precipice, and want someone at your side to steady and support you. We could go abroad for a time until the incident of your escape was quite forgotten. Do not despise me for my apparent boldness—my seeming unwomanliness; I am willing, as your wife, to share your secret, and any disgrace attaching thereto."

He could not but feel grateful for her words, which implied a devotion he had no claim upon.

Myrtle had adjudged her mercenary as well as ambitious; that she was not the former she had given him convincing proofs. From first to last she had put herself in the right—he, himself, in the wrong—and had then offered to connect herself with his disgrace by a close, indissoluble tie—that of wedlock!

After all, he might do worse than close with her offer. She was highly educated, refined, and well bred—a woman who would do the honors of his home with credit to him and herself.

"Miss Pride," he said, "I cannot find words to express my gratitude for this convincing mark of your devotion to my interests. My heart is too seared ever again to feel the love of a husband. It was buried in the grave of my young martyr wife. Give me time to think; it would be wrong to accept your offer at once—you might regret it hereafter; besides, I must consult Myrtle."

"Consult a mere child?" she thought, somewhat angrily, but said:

"I was affection for her that had something to do with my offer. The Peytonson came of a proud stock—one whisper would break off the intended match. I have done my duty; the issue is in your hands."

"You have come out of a trying ordeal nobly, my dear Miss Pride," he said quietly. "Whatever my decision may prove to be, you will always take a place in my heart as a true friend."

"Consult her? Let him! If she thinks I, upon whose life there has not fallen a single stain, am not good enough to be the wife of her convict-father, then let her look to it, for she will receive scant mercy from me!"

HISTORICAL NOTES.

The use of firearms in war in England was introduced as early as the reign of Edward III. (1327).

Windmills were not known in England at the conquest, but were introduced in less than a century afterward.

A trade with Norway is known to have been carried on by the Scotch in the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The coast of Connecticut was first explored by one of the early Dutch navigators, Adrian Block, who, in 1614, was the first European to sail through Hell Gate.

The principal legislative acts in the reign of Henry III. of England are his confirmation of the great charter and of the charter of the forest. There are also some additional laws of this king yet extant which much polished the common law.

Gloves appear to have been very rare among the Anglo-Saxons. Among the representations of male figures they are never met with, but from a law of Ethelred the Unready it may be inferred that at the close of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century they were great rarities, five pairs forming a considerable part of the duty paid by a society of German merchants for the protection of their trade.

The Boston port bill, a law passed by England to close the port of Boston, went into effect June 1, 1774. The day was observed in Hartford, Conn., as a day of public mourning. The town house was hung with black, a copy of the bill was posted on it, and bells were tolled all day. Even as far off as Virginia the house of burgesses attended a solemn religious service on the occasion, and heard a patriotic sermon from the chaplain.

Two colonies formed by colonists who came out under Gen. John Winthrop, the Plymouth and Massachusetts bays, were for many years independent of one another; but the Plymouth colony, though the older of the two, grew far more slowly than the other, and was at least united with it in 1692 under the name of Massachusetts, the name being taken from one of the tribes of Indians inhabiting the soil. The meaning of the word is said to be "Blue Hills."

The Art of Milking.

Suburban Resident—"Yes, I want a useful man about my country-place. Can you milk?"

Apprentice—"Yes, sir."

"Which side of a cow do you sit on when milking?"

"Well, sir, O never milked but wan cow, as, bedad, a good dale av the toin Oi was on ooth sides av her, sir."

A Nice Plaything for Children.

Mrs. Bandbox—"You said the train I should take leaves at 10:30, didn't you?"

Ticket Agent—"Yes, madam; and I think I've told you that about ten times already."

Mrs. Bandbox—"Yes, I know you have; but my little boy says he likes to hear you talk."

Not Superstitious Herself.

"So you wouldn't move into your new house yesterday because it was Friday? Fie, fie, Mrs. Baldwin! I thought you were superior to such little superstitions."

"I know it was foolish in me, Mrs. Rambo, but we all have our weaknesses, you know."

"But that's such a ridiculous notion. The idea that there can be anything in the mere—why, Mrs. Baldwin! That's an awful looking wart on your nose. Why don't you rub it with a piece of ham rind and then bury the rind under a stone and walk away from it backwards? I've taken off dozens of them that way."

Sympathy.

Captain (to stowaway)—"So, you young rascal, ran away from home, did you? You ought to be ashamed for leaving home, and thrashed again for getting aboard a ship without permission."

Stowaway—"Please, Sir, my sister commenced takin' music lessons an' practicin' scales on the piano, an' I thought there would be so pianos on ships—"

Captain—"Come to my arm, my son. I had a musical sister once myself."

DAMMING THE ARCTIC CURRENT.

A Scheme to Temper the Climate of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The announcement that E. J. Bender has succeeded in making arrangements in London for the purchase of the Quebec & Montreal railway and its extension to the Straits of Belle Isle revives the proposal of Gen. Sir Selby Smyth, laid before the Dominion government in 1879, for diverting the Arctic current from the Gulf of St. Lawrence by filling in the Straits of Belle Isle, which would serve as a bridge connecting Newfoundland with the mainland for railway purposes. Gen. Smyth's idea of constructing a dam across the straits does not appear to have been original with that gentleman, as Lieut. Maury, it is understood, laid a similar proposal before the British government over thirty years ago. In his report to the Dominion government Gen. Smyth draws attention to the fact that the Straits of Belle Isle are open to the northeast, thus receiving the direct flow of the polar current down Baffin's bay. This icy stream, at from two to four miles an hour, pours its way into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, overcoming by its greater density the warm gulf stream from the southern latitudes. The cold stream, he says, divides into two branches near Cape L'Amour—one running westward up the gulf and the other southeastward, discharging into the ocean again between Newfoundland and Cape Breton. The general explains that this branch then sweeps along the eastern coast of Nova Scotia and shoulders off the warm water further out to sea, which would otherwise find its way along the shores of the continent and into the gulf. If, therefore, the polar current could be excluded and deflected eastward of Newfoundland into the open ocean the climatic effects, by the exchange of warm water, would be very marked in the gulf and adjacent shores.

The Only Basis of Trade With Her.

He was amongst, with a big basket of goods on his arm, and he had just rapped on the door of a country farmhouse. An old lady of forbidding aspect opened the door and sized him up before he had a chance to open his mouth and said savagely: "Don't want anything ter-day."

"But, madam," he replied, with a weary attempt at a smile, as he mopped the perspiration from his brow with his coattail, "allow me to show you the goods, please. I have washing soda at two cents a pound, silver tea spoons at ten cents per dozen and the finest tea at twenty cents a pound, with a teapot and saucer thrown in; this alone is worth—"

"Don't want anything ter-day," she repeated, still more savagely.

"Madam," he replied, as he slowly returned the goods to the basket, "if I were to offer you the whole business for ten cents would you take it?"

"No, I wouldn't. I don't want your old, stale, shop-worn stuff, at any price; so clear out."

"Madam," he continued sadly, "if there is anything in the world that you would buy just let me know, and I will bring it to you on my next trip."

"All right, your persistent puppy," she replied. "The next time you come bring a dozen genuine ten-dollar bills for a dollar a dozen and I will take the lot. Now, get out, and go and load up with something saleable before you show that red nose of yours here again."

Bargains in Grape and No Deaths.

Mr. Younglove—"Why, my dear, what makes you look so miserable? Is there any bad news in the paper?"

Mrs. Younglove—"No, no, not exactly bad news; but oh, George, don't you know of any of our relatives who are in poor health? I never saw such bargains in grape in all my born days."

Genuine Frankness.

"Miss Gladys," said old Moneybags, "if my suit is not agreeable to you say so frankly, but do not, I beg of you, tell me that old, old story that you will always look upon me as a brother."

"Sir," replied the lovely maiden, as her eye lit up with the deathless flame of a pure young heart's devotion, "I do not love you well enough for a brother, but I have no objection to taking you as a husband."

He Commenced When Young.

Mrs. Razzle—"What a terrible wreck young Perkins is, to be sure. It is sad to see such a dissipated man."

Mrs. Dazzle—"Yes, indeed, but you must remember that he was admitted to the bar at a very early age."

A Tramp Scheme.

"Oh, but! That's a tramp scheme."

"Tramp scheme? What the deuce do you mean by a tramp scheme?"

"Oh, it won't work."

Anomalous.

Cholly—"Seems to me the actions of tall-ors are very contradictory."

Wally—"Why?"

"No matter how good your credit is with them they are always ready to serve you with a suit."

His Health Was Very Delicate.

Bogers—"I told you, sir, when the Chick-asaw Bank pressed poor old Jones for settlement it signed his death-warrant!"

Williams—"You don't say so! why did it affect him so seriously?"

"He had taken a heavy cold, and the draft from the bank brought on pneumonia."

[Boston Times.]

The Same Thing.

Jones—"What is Penney's business?"

Smith—"He's a contractor now."

Jones—"What did he use to be?"

Smith—"A corset maker."

Jones—"Well, I don't see much difference."

The Tale of a Kiss.