

# PARDONED AT LAST.

A THRILLING CHRISTMAS STORY BY "JACK FROST."

## ACT THE SIXTH.

Bertram Dene was anxious about Myrtle's safety now that the Duke had taken the field against him again, for well he guessed that poor Becky Pride had perished in the place of Myrtle.

The little party had left Fairlawn House almost by stealth, so fearful was Dene lest anyone should track them.

He had left word with the housekeeper to discharge the servants and to remain herself as caretaker.

He took a chalet in the Alps far from the tracks of tourists, and meant to remain there till his innocence could be proved.

Society had turned its back upon him. An escaped convict enacting the role of a millionaire and giving princely entertainments was undorably amongst the latest of novelties, but it had its drawbacks.

Myrtle was very beautiful and engaging, and young men very impressionable. Only fancy a noble lord waking up one morning to find he had for a daughter-in-law the daughter of an escaped convict!

These considerations did but weigh as the dust in the balance, compared with the safety of his daughter.

Among the solitude of these snowy mountains there was freedom from danger—time to think and counterplot his implacable enemy.

Molly Spriggins was not in love with her new abode; but she loved Myrtle, and to be near her was the chief thing.

"When are we going back to London, Miss Myrtle?" she asked, it's getting near Christmas now. Wasn't last Christmas jolly?"

"I see no chance of returning in time, Molly; why, child, it only wants a week to Christmas."

"Give me Englishmen anyway before these furri-chaps; why, they can't even jabber to you."

"That's not their fault," laughed Myrtle; "you ought to learn their language, and then you'd find them nice people enough."

"Catch me wastin' my time," snapped Molly; "one chap took off his hat the other day, and laughed in my face."

"He meant to be polite," laughed Myrtle. "I paid him off," snorted Molly; "I gave him a wunner on the head with my umbrella—he ought to understand English after that."

"I'm afraid you miss your old home, Myrtle?"

"It isn't that, Miss Myrtle. I'm happy enough where you are. It's not being able to continue that's breaking my heart."

"Are you going to leave me, Molly?" Myrtle asked in surprise.

"Me, miss? Catch me."

"But you said you couldn't continue."

"Lawks, miss, you don't see how the cat jumps. I mean to be continued next week. I've got up to, oh, such a lovely part in the tale I'm reading; where the bold, bad, one-eyed brigand runs away with a real princess; and the bottle-nosed sea serpent puts tall round a mountain, meaning, of course, to topple it over; and now I can't continue—it's too bad."

Bertram Dene entered at this moment equipped for hunting, and kissed Myrtle tenderly.

"Do stay at home, papa," she pleaded.

"Why, dear Myrtle? You need have no anxiety about me, darling; I'm satter here by far than in England."

"I can't give you a reason; but I've had bad dreams lately."

"Your digestion is out of order—you must take more exercise, my pet. Good day, dear, I'm off. I've secured the services of experienced guide, and hope to bring home a large game."

She kissed him and watched him while he remained in sight, full of a presentiment of some evil. No such fears occupied the breast of Bertram Dene, whose nerves had gathered strength among these mountainous fastnesses.

So far as he was personally concerned, he did not regret the change from England.

He had heard from his old friend Pierre Verlon, who was sanguine that before a week had elapsed he would receive the czar's pardon for a crime he had never committed.

He had some excellent sport, and was resting in a hut high up the mountain while the guide prepared luncheon.

Full of dreams of coming happiness when once more he could look the world in the face, and Myrtle would no longer bear the heart of having a convict father, he closed his eyes.

Before he was aware of it he found himself bound with a strong rope from behind. Then, throwing himself upon him, the guide laid his legs tightly together, and Bertram Dene lay helpless.

"What is the meaning of this outrage. Would you murder me?"

"No, Bertram Dene," said the duke, taking off his slouched hat and false beard and whiskers. "I won't murder you; cold and want will kill you. This mountain is not likely to be visited by sportsmen."

"Fiend, devil, release me, and let me fight the matter out with you, man to man."

hours when a man mounted on a mule rode up to the chalet.

"Well, you ugly-looking baboon, who are you a-grinning at?" Molly demanded.

"Myrtle Dene." He said nothing more, for he perceived his interlocutor spoke only English. Had he understood what she said he would not have flattered himself.

Myrtle, hearing her name, came out, and there learnt from the messenger that her father had met with an accident and was waiting her coming.

"Where on earth are you going to, Miss Myrtle?" Molly asked, when she told her to pack a valise for her.

"To my father; he has met with an accident," she replied, tearfully.

"I'm coming, too, of course," Molly said, resolutely.

"No, no; you can remain and get things ready for him against I return, Molly."

"My name isn't Molly Spriggins if I let you go with that out-throat chaps alone. Why, he's the 'exact pictur' of the Bold, Bad, One-Eyed Brigand. Where you go I won't be far off."

Myrtle was too wretched to argue the question with her, and presently the pair came down ready for the journey, Molly carrying the valise.

"The mule can carry one only," said the messenger, eyeing Molly with evident disfavour.

"What's that he says, Miss Myrtle?" Molly asked, tightening her hold on the formidable umbrella.

"That the mule will only carry one."

"What a fool he must be," Molly snorted. "Does he think I take it for a homibus that carries inside and outside? He will have to walk; so will I."

The fellow would have remonstrated, but Molly's resolute face deterred him.

So the journey commenced in silence, Molly walking in the rear of the guide, but close to him, to keep a wary eye upon him.

"There's some mischief here," thought the astute maid. My opinion is that master's enemy has found him out, and is up to larks."

After a lapse of two hours they reached a station, little better than a hut, in the valley, from whence the train could be seen.

Myrtle, whose beauty caused the male passengers to look at her with admiration, was hurrying after the messenger, who was carrying her valise, with Molly coming up behind, when she heard a gentleman say, with outstretched hands—

"Why, its Myrtle Dene!"

"Erle! Oh, I am so glad," she cried, and the next instant was folded in his arms, while the messenger stood aside, an evil look in his eyes.

"Where is your father, Myrtle?" Erle asked.

"He went out shooting this morning, and met with an accident. I am going to him."

"How—surely not by that train? I've just arrived by it; it is express from here until it reaches the French frontier. Myrtle, if you go I must accompany you. There is something very strange in all this. Is that your guide?" looking in the fellow's direction.

"Yes, dear Erle—oh! how glad I am you are here; it may be treachery."

"Where are you taking this lady to, fellow?" Erle asked, sharply.

Rising his hat politely, he answered— "To her father, monsieur."

A paper fluttered to the ground when he raised his hat, and Molly, who had come up and was listening to the conversation between the lovers, darted forward and picked it up, while the guide uttered a smothered malediction.

Molly handed the paper to Erle, who glanced at its contents, and said, excitedly—

"Myrtle, you have barely escaped falling into the hands of your father's enemy—the Duke of Brittany! Listen—'To Mons. Dupon,—Take care of Myrtle Dene, and reward the messenger with a hundred francs. I shall be with you soon.—BRITANNY.'"

Molly heard all this, and, gathering its import, made for the guide, snatched the valise from him, and gave him a "wunner" with her umbrella, saying—

"You nasty, frog-eating villain, get out, or I'll pulverise you!"

Perceiving this game was up, the fellow took to his heels, pursued by Molly, shouting—

"Stop, thief! Stop the Bold, Bad, One-eyed Brigand!"

The train was just steaming away, when the fellow opened the door of a carriage, and scrambled in.

time," he replied, in answer to her father's anxious inquiry. "I left her at the chalet."

"Let us hasten there at once," Dene said, in alarm; "the duke is villain enough to make a fresh attempt during our absence."

"You may safely trust her to the keeping of Molly," Erle replied, with a smile. "No one could gain an entrance easily to the chalet while she guards it."

"What did I tell you?" laughed Erle, on reaching the chalet. "Look at the preparations Molly has made for standing a siege."

Molly was at one of the windows which commanded the approach to the house, with three rifles by her side, four pistols, and a couple of swords, besides several heavy logs of wood.

She readily admitted the party, however, and then Myrtle's joy was complete, for her father and lover were with her.

Great, good news was in store for Bertram Dene next morning.

A letter arrived from Pierre Verlon, its contents as follows:—

"DEAR OLD FRIEND—R jice, you are a free man at last—your innocence has been fully proved. I am too old travel to the Alps with the Cz's pardon; but will meet you on Christmas Eve at Fairlawn House, whether you can return at once. You have nothing to fear—the papers in every civilised country will soon ring with an account of your martyrdom, your innocence. Kiss sweet Myrtle for me.—Yours ever devotedly, PIERRE."

Orders were given to pack up and be off at once.

Molly was delighted, and danced and sang to her heart's content at the immediate prospect of getting back to London in time for Christmas Day.

Myrtle's heart was full of delicious joy, for the stain which had been removed from her father's life left her at liberty to wed her handsome lover, Erle Peyton.

They arrived in London early on the morning of Christmas Eve, and Molly nearly lost the train for Richmond by going in search of her continuations, 'The Bold, Bad, One-Eyed Brigand' and 'The Bottle-Nosed Sea-Serpent.'

Christmas Eve again; the chimneys of Fairlawn House gave signs of the house being once more inhabited.

Some of the old servants were back—among them 'James,' Molly's handsome footman.

A proud, happy look was on Bertram Dene's face, as he sat in his library completing his diary.

The task brought back to him thoughts of poor Becky Pride, who was resting in Brompton Cemetery.

"Ah me!" he sighed, "my secret has not cost only my dear, but her, too—with all her faults she was true to me and mine, at the last."

Servants were busy putting up holly and mistletoe, and other Christmas decorations, when Myrtle entered, a sprig of mistletoe in her pretty white hand, on which she wore an engagement ring—Erle's gift.

Holding the mystic berries over his head, she said, sweetly:—

"I'm going to anticipate Christmas, papa, and kiss you, you dear old darling."

"What if I resist?" he asked, laughing, a wealth of tender love and affection in his eyes.

"That would be treason, sir," she replied, and forthwith gave him sweet innocent kisses, each one straight from the heart.

"Papa," she said, presently.

"Yes, you audacious puss; what fresh toll do you want to exact from your doing old father?"

"Doing, yes; old, no," she replied, fondly, caressing his hair, as she leant lovingly on his shoulder. "I want you to give me a cheque for fifty pounds."

"To buy gewgaws, eh?" he laughed, as he opened a drawer and took out his cheque-book.

"No, papa; to present it as a thank-offering to the poor through our worthy vicar."

"I'll make it a hundred, my darling—here, run away; you're a good girl—I hear Erle's voice."

She blushed, and tripped away as lightly as a fawn, to run right into her lover's arms, who at once snatched the sprig of mistletoe from her, and made her pay love's toll.

Molly, when Myrtle sought her, was found stowed away in her bedroom, devouring the back numbers of her favorite romances—real shockers—warranted equal to any electric machine ever invented.

"You'll turn your head, Molly," said Myrtle, with gentle reproof.

"Oh! Miss Myrtle, it's lovely; you should just read about what the four-eyed Amazon did."

"No, thank you, Molly. I don't want to be troubled with the nightmare, on Christmas Eve especially."

"She slewed a whole army with lightning from two of her eyes, and watched the larks of another army with the other two; fancy. My! wouldn't I like to be like her, just!"

The duke started back in blank dismay when he saw her, and his discomfort was heightened when Erle Peyton stepped forward, and taking Myrtle by the hand, said—

"Father, this lady, the daughter of a convict, as you style him, is my affianced wife; you are my father, though, till now, I never knew you were Duke of Brittany."

"Degenerate boy, unhand her, lest I curse you!" cried the duke; "she betrayed my sister, and is a low criminal."

"Duke, you lie!" said Dene; "your sister was lawfully married to me and if there is a criminal present it is you. No son of yours shall wed child of mine. Myrtle, leave him, and come to me."

"Father," cried Erle, "don't destroy the happiness of two human beings. I love Myrtle, my cousin; if you have wronged her father, plead for forgiveness—he is too noble to refuse it. And you, sir (turning to Dene), be just, and do not visit the faults of my father on my head."

"Before either of those appealed to could answer Inspector Urquhart entered, followed by Martha Skinner.

Martha Skinner, on seeing the duke, whose face was of a livid pallor, pointed at him and screamed—

"That's the man that brought all the trouble on my poor Jack; he gave him money to do it, curses him. I hid as long as I could, but they caught me at last."

All eyes were turned on the duke, who said, hoarsely, his passion almost choking him:

"I did employ that woman's husband to help me to get possession of my niece, to take her back with me to France, so that she might escape from the contaminating influences of her father who is a convict, a gaol-bird."

Linking her father's arm in hers, Myrtle said, proudly:

"I would rather be the daughter convict-father, than the niece of a cruel man like you."

"An escaped convict?" cried the inspector "Where from?"

"From Siberia," said Dene, quietly.

"Good luck to you, sir, I say," replied the inspector. "There's many an innocent man sent there, and if I am a judge of faces you were one of them."

At this moment Pierre Verlon came from concealment, and handing Bertram the Cz's pardon and an autograph letter, said: "Duke of Brittany, these give you the lie."

"Jus! he to be punished?" screamed Martha Skinner. "Can the rich tempt the poor to commit crime and then skulk out of it? Inspector, take him in charge; handcuff him! Don't let him escape—don't!"

"She became no violent that she had to be removed from the room by the police."

"I must take you in charge, sir, on your own confession of having induced Skinner to unlawfully abduct one of Her Majesty's subjects," said the inspector, placing his hand on the duke's shoulder.

"To you I owe this," he hissed, glaring at Dene with all the savagery of a tiger brought to bay; "you have wrecked the happiness of my sister and ruined mine!"

"Let Heaven and the world judge between us. You, for twenty-one weary years, have persecuted, ruined me for having tempted your sister to contract a *mesalliance*. Yet you have been guilty of the same thing—perhaps worse, for while your sister could bear my name, on which no stain has ever fallen, your son perhaps cannot inherit your title," said Dene, with all the earnest force of a judge addressing a prisoner.

"This false; at my death my son will be Duke of Brittany," he retorted, savagely; "but sooner than he should wed your daughter I would kill him with my own hand."

Stepping back a few paces the duke drew a revolver, and before he could be checked, fired at Dene.

Erle Peyton, who was standing close to his uncle, seeing his father's intention, threw himself in the way and fell bathed in blood.

"Unhappy man, you have slain your own son!" Dene cried, horror-stricken, while the inspector tried to wrest the revolver from the maniac, for by this time the duke was nothing else. But he was, possessed of the strength of a dozen men, and shook the police officer off as if he were a rat.

Another report, and Charles, Duke of Brittany, fell dead, slain by his own hand.

At this moment, when all present were horror-stricken by this tragedy, a body of waits in the grounds struck up. "When Angels Watched their Flocks by Night."

At this moment Pierre Verlon walked in, saying, "A Merry Christmas!" dear friends, "And a Happy New Year!"

Jack Frost, echoing those words, bids his readers "Farewell."

[THE END]

Two years have passed, and once more Christmas Eve has come with its wonted *altes-de-camp*—frost and snow.

Many changes have taken place in the world; but Jack Frost remained, as ever, winter's king.

But how has it fared with the personages of this eventful story—the record of many Christmases?

If you follow Jack Frost, he will show you, and take you down into fair Kent—one of the gardens of Merrie old England.

Dene purchased a large estate in Kent, and settled there with his daughter and—yes—his wife.

spended freely, some in Canadian costume. There was plenty to eat and drink for all, and also prizes for successful competitors.

At its close Christmas carols were sung, and the guests retired cheering their host and hostess to the echo, and wishing them and theirs "A Merry Christmas."

The family were assembled in the drawing-room, chatting about the recent tournament, when Molly, looking more saucy and plump than ever, came in and watered something in Myrtle's little pink ear, causing her face to pale and flush alternately.

Presently Myrtle stole out and was soon folded to her true love's heart.

"Erle, it is rash of you to come here," she said softly; "you know how bitter my father is against our marriage."

"Yes, to my cost. I often regret that I had not died on that fatal Christmas Eve."

She placed her small white hand on his lips, and said—

"Erle, for shame—you know that if you had died I could not have survived you."

"Oh, my love, think of my misery exiled from you, and plead for me. I once stood between your father and death."

"Yes, and you saved my life, dear Erle; and also delivered me again when I was in peril—dear papa must have perished on the mountain side but for you. I wish the angel of mercy would touch his heart tonight."

"Amen to that! Let me plead my own cause with him. This is Christmas Eve, when all but those whose hearts are adamant, freely forgive and forget injuries. Do not seek to turn me from my purpose, darling."

"Heaven forbid I should," she said, earnestly. "I tell you what I will do, dear Erle. I will sing 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing.' He is very fond of that carol; you can steal in, and perhaps he will relent; dear mother will second your pleading, I know."

"He kissed her passionately, and let her go, breathing a silent prayer to Heaven for the success of his own mission.

Soon Myrtle's pure soprano voice was heard singing her father's favourite carol.

Erle, Duke of Brittany stole in at the door noiselessly, and ere Bertram Dene was aware of it, knelt at his feet.

"Uucle, on this holy Christmas Eve, let me plead with you for my poor, unhappy father's forgiveness. Do not belie those blessed words dear Myrtle is singing—

"Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."

Do not continue to visit my father's sins on me, his unhappy son—give me Myrtle for my wife, or slay me at your feet."

While he pleaded Myrtle continued to sing the carol softly, until her tender rendering of it became not a hymn, but a prayer.

Bertram, dear husband, remember how Heaven has blessed you, and that one day we must all plead for mercy before that Great White Throne," said his wife, with solemn earnestness.

Myrtle stole softly from the piano, and, nestling her cheek against her father's, said:—

"Remember! but for Erle I should not have a father now, or you a daughter. How desolate mamma would have been then."

"Erle, my brave lad, I always loved you as a son—do now," Bertram Dene said.

"Against you personally I have no enmity, and, indeed, I have learnt to think forgivingly of your unappy father; but I'm loth to bring a curse upon you and Myrtle by joining your hands. Remember how bitter your father was in life."

"Yes; but he has gone where he sees things in a purer, clearer light. His sin broke my poor mother's heart; if you disarrange me from your heart and home I shall be doubly orphaned."

"What say you, dear wife?" Bertram Dene asked earnestly.

"Give our daughter to him, with all my heart, Bertram!"

"And you, dear Myrtle, will you risk all for love's sake?"

"Yes, dear father; for no curse has ever yet followed true love—was love that bridged over earth and heaven. Yes, I am willing to become Erle's wife."

"I am answered, and am content."

Then joining their hands together, he asked Heaven's blessing on them, to which Marie, who had suffered so much, said "Amen!"

At this moment Pierre Verlon walked in, saying, "A Merry Christmas!" dear friends, "And a Happy New Year!"

Jack Frost, echoing those words, bids his readers "Farewell."

[THE END]

A CAPTIVE WHITE GIRL.

Taken by the Blackfoot Indians in a Raid into the United States.

A correspondent of the London Graphic who accompanied Lord and Lady Stanley on their trip across the continent, writes to that newspaper that the Blackfoot Indians under the famous Crowfoot perhaps retain more of their original character than any of the other tribes. A grand reception was accorded to Lord and Lady Stanley. Lady Alice Stanley and Miss Lyster braved the possibility of being tomahawked by taking *racifio* shots with photographic cameras at a war dance by one of the most bellicose of the tribe. He adds: "A captive of one of the chiefs of the Blackfoot is a little white girl about 9 years old. She was brought into camp on a pony, dressed in rich bead-work vestments, which ill became her fair hair and little white face. Full of intelligence, she sat to be sketched and photographed. I only hope that publicity will be the means of this child being handed over to people of her own color, though she is treated with every care and great affection, I believe, by her captors. The fate which awaits her when she is a few years older is sad to contemplate. I was told by a good authority that she had been captured during a raid in United States territory, in which her father, an officer, was killed."

Interesting to Parents.

Mr. Robt. Laidlaw, of the Ottawa Free Press, says: "Our babe was so choked up she could hardly breathe. In fact at one time we feared that she would choke to death. Respiration became more difficult every minute, for which we could get no relief by the usual remedies formerly used. Having a bottle of Nasal Balm in the house my wife suggested trying it, and in twenty minutes from the first application the child was sleeping and breathing easily, and in twenty-four hours not a sign of the trouble remained. It is an invaluable remedy for children as well as grown people."