

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 ones.

Erle had a long conversation with Mr. Dane 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?" Erle answered, eagerly.

"Yes, under certain conditions: that you obtain your father's consent—that you 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?" Erle asked sadly.

"No; it is clear that you are not related to that man," Dane 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; the only way to see Myrtle to love her as a daughter."

"I trust the love you profess for my child will stand the test of time," Dane 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," Dane said, with a sigh. "May Heaven shield and protect you both, in my earnest prayer."

Erle 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—now hourly.

The thoughts of each heart were pure, unclouded; no dark places were there—no spots 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.

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

It brought a secret joy to Mr. Dane's heart to see the tranquil content of the one being earth held for him. He was soled 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 coast by leaving his service, when something happened to give her fresh hope.

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 'over 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. Dane, 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 ornate clock on the marble mantel-piece 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 crêpe 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, also her watch and 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 job to crack from here to John O'Grady's. 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."

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

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

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

Myrtle and Mrs. Peyton screamed in terror, and the burglar fled, leaving the room in confusion.

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

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. Dane took the affair very quietly, and made light of the robbery; he dined calmly upon his food. He knew that the criminal was safely 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 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 anxiety. She had to resolve, to cause concern, and curious about the recent events, and to answer numerous letters of condolence and inquiry. But the letter brought the circumstances 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 flashed, 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 muttered, 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, Myrtle felt, was

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

We have 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 Pecky 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 muttered, a piteous look in his eyes, that cut her to the heart.

"Duty here—charge her with her treachery with theft! Your name is not to be, 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 dismiss her, I cannot muzzle her tongue, child. The Duke would hear of it, and frustrate all the plans I have vowed 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 wrong 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 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 prove 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 hunt 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; thrice 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 wretch having the power to injure them.

"Bitterly cruel, I admit; but our turn 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.

"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, revengingly.

"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 alices 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 scolloped meat sufficient for another meal.

An essential aid to easy carving, and one often overlooked, is that the plaster 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 unsuccessful carving impossible, and inward disgust abundant.

The plaster should be placed near the carver so that he may easily reach any part of the fowl without turning the fowl around. 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, sharp, 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. "Hyeterical 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 with mankind only represent themselves. Workmaning 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 colleges 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, no, dear, only rehearsal! I'm going on amateur stage, and I don't want what's all.

Man—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 Weigh 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 weighs about it.

The Race is Sometimes to the Strong.

"That rival of yours seems to be in a fair way to out you. He's a pretty athletic fellow." Are you not afraid of him?" "I? Oh no; but his father is, so he has a better show 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' Tasti Fruit Gum. Sold by all druggists and confectioners. 5 cents.