



THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

By VAUGHAN KESTER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY D. MELVILLE



SYNOPSIS.

The scene at the opening of the story is laid in the library of an old worn-out southern plantation, known as the Barony. The place is to be sold, and its history and that of the owners, the Quintards, is the subject of discussion by Jonathan Crenshaw, a business man, a stranger known as Blount and Bob Yancy, a farmer, when Hannibal Wayne Hazard, a mysterious child of the old southern family, makes his appearance. Yancy tells how he adopted the boy Nathaniel Ferris, a friend of the Quintards, who he took to the old plantation home, but the Quintards deny any knowledge of the boy. Yancy keeps Hannibal, Captain Murrell, a friend of the Quintards, appears and asks questions about the Hannibal. Trouble at Scratch Hill, when Hannibal is kidnapped by Dave Blount, Captain Murrell's agent, Yancy overtakes Blount, gives him a thrashing and secures the boy. Yancy appears before Squire Balaam, and is discharged with costs for the plaintiff. Betty Maitoy, a friend of the Ferrises, has an encounter with Captain Murrell, who forces his attentions on her, and is rescued by Bruce Carrington. Betty sets out for Tennessee with Carrington. Yancy and Hannibal disappear, with Murrell on their trail. Hannibal arrives at the home of Judge Slosson. The judge rescues him in the bayou, the grandson of an old friend. Murrell arrives at Judge's home. Cavendish family on raft rescue Yancy, who is apparently dead. Price breaks jail. Betty and Carrington arrive at Belle Plain. Hannibal's ruse discloses some startling things to the judge. Hannibal and Betty meet again. Murrell arrives in Belle Plain. Price is playing for big stakes. Yancy awakes from long dreamless sleep on board the raft. Judge Price makes startling discoveries in looking up land titles. Charlie Norton, a young planter, who assists the judge, is mysteriously assaulted. Norton informs Carrington that Betty has promised to marry him. Norton is mysteriously shot. Murrell on Murrell's plot. He plans uprising of negroes. Judge Price, with Hannibal, visits Betty, and she keeps the boy as a companion. In a stroll Betty talks with Hannibal they meet Bess Hicks, daughter of the overseer, who warns Betty of danger and counsels her to leave Belle Plain at once. Betty, terrified, acts on Bess' advice, and on their way their carriage is stopped by Slosson, the tavern keeper, and a confederate, and Betty and Hannibal are made prisoners.

CHAPTER XIX (Continued).

As they stumbled forward through the thick obscurity he continued his personal revelations, the present enterprise having roused whatever there was of sentiment slumbering in his soul. At last they came out on a wide bayou; a white mist hung above it, and on the low shore leaf and branch were dripping with the night dews. Keeping close to the water's edge Slosson led the way to a point where a skiff was drawn up on the bank.

"Step in, ma'am," he said, when he had launched it.

"I will go no farther!" said Betty in desperation. She felt an overwhelming fear, the full horror of the unknown lay hold of her, and she gave a piercing cry for help. Slosson swung about on his heel and seized her. For a moment she struggled to escape, but the man's big hand pinioned her. "No more of that!" he warned, then he recovered himself and laughed. "You could yell till you was black in the face, ma'am, and there'd be no one to hear you."

"Where are you taking me?" and Betty's voice faltered between the sudden sobs that choked her.

"Just across to George Hicks'."

"For what purpose?"

"You'll know in plenty of time." And Slosson leered at her through the darkness.

"Hannibal is to go with me?" asked Betty tremulously.

"Sure!" agreed Slosson affably.

"Your nigger, too—quite a party."

Betty stepped into the skiff. She felt her hopes quicken—she was thinking of Bess; whatever the girl's motives, she had wished her to escape. She would wish it now more than ever since the very thing she had striven to prevent had happened. Slosson seated himself and took up the oars, Bunker followed with Hannibal and they pushed off. No word was spoken until they disembarked on the opposite shore, when Slosson addressed Bunker.

"I reckon I can manage that young rip-staver; you go back after Sherrod and the bigger," he said.

He conducted his captives up the bank and they entered a clearing. Looking across this Betty saw where a cabin window framed a single square of light. They advanced toward this and presently the dark outline of the cabinet itself became distinguishable. A moment later Slosson paused, a door yielded to his hand, and Betty and the boy were thrust into the room where Murrell had held his conference with Pentress and Ware. The two women were now its only occupants, and the mother, gross and shapeless, turned an expressionless face on the intruders; but the daughter shrank into the shadow, her burning glance fixed on Betty.

"Here's yo' guests, old lady!" said Mr. Slosson. Mrs. Hicks rose from the three-legged stool on which she was sitting.

"Hand me the candle, Bess," she ordered.

At one side of the room was a steep flight of stairs which gave access to the loft overhead. Mrs. Hicks, by a gesture, signified that Betty and Hannibal were to ascend these stairs; they did so and found themselves on a narrow landing inclosed by a partition of rough planks; this partition



"Here's yo' Guests, Old Woman!"

was pierced by a low door. Mrs. Hicks, who had followed close at their heels, handed the candle to Betty.

"In yonder!" she said briefly, nodding toward the door.

"Wait!" cried Betty in a whisper.

"No," said the woman with an almost masculine sternness of tone. "I got nothing to say." She pushed them into the attic, and, closing the door, fastened it with a stout wooden bar.

Beyond that door, which seemed to have closed on every hope, Betty held the tallow dip aloft, and by its uncertain and flickering light surveyed her prison. The briefest glance sufficed. The room contained two shake-down beds and a stool; there was a window in the gable, but a piece of heavy plank was spiked before it.

"Miss Betty, don't you be scared," whispered Hannibal. "When the judge hears we're gone, him and Mr. Mahaffy will try to find us. They'll be right off to Belle Plain—the judge is always wanting to do that, only Mr. Mahaffy never lets him—but now he won't be able to stop him."

"Oh, Hannibal, Hannibal, what can he do there?—what can any one do there?" And a dead pallor overspread the girl's face. To speak of the blind groping of her friends but served to fix the horror of their situation in her mind.

"I don't know, Miss Betty, but the judge is always thinking of things to do; seems like they was mostly things no one else would ever think of."

Betty had placed the candle on the stool and seated herself on one of the beds. There was the murmur of voices in the room below; she wondered if her fate was under consideration and what that fate was to be. Hannibal, who had been examining the window, returned to her side.

"Miss Betty, if we could just get out of this loft we could steal their skiff and row down to the river; I reckon they got just the one boat; the only way they could get to us would be to swim out, and if they done that we could pound 'em over the head with the oars—the least little thing sinks you when you're in the water." But this murderous fancy of his failed to interest Betty.

Presently she heard Sherrod and Bunker come up from the shore with George. Slosson joined them and there was a brief discussion, then an interval of silence, and the sound of voices again as the three white men moved back across the field in the direction of the bayou. There succeeded a period of utter stillness, both in the cabin and in the clearing, a somber hush that plunged Betty yet deeper in despair. Wild thoughts assailed her, thoughts against which she struggled with all the strength of her will.

In that hour of stress Hannibal was sustained by his faith in the judge. He saw his patron's powerful and picturesque intelligence applied to solving the mystery of their disappearance from Belle Plain; it was in-

conceivable that this could prove otherwise than disastrous to Mr. Slosson, and he endeavored to share the confidence he was feeling with Betty, but there was something so forced and unnatural in the girl's voice and manner when she discussed his conjectures that he quickly fell into an awed silence. At last, and it must have been some time after midnight, troubled slumbers claimed him. No moment of forgetfulness came to Betty. She was waiting for what—she did not know! The candle burnt lower and lower and finally went out and she was left in darkness, but again she was conscious of sounds from the room below. At first it was only a word or a sentence, then the guarded speech became a steady monotone that ran deep into the night. Eventually this ceased and Betty fancied she heard sobs.

CHAPTER XX.

Murrell Shows His Hand.

At length points of light began to show through chinks in the logs. Hannibal roused and sat up, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands.

"Wasn't you able to sleep none?" he inquired. Betty shook her head. He looked at her with an expression of troubled concern. "How soon do you reckon the judge will know?" he asked.

"Very soon now, dear," Hannibal was greatly consoled by this opinion. "Miss Betty, he will love to find us."

"Hark! What was that?" for Betty had caught the distant splash of oars. Hannibal found a chink in the logs through which by dint of much squinting he secured a partial view of the bayou.

"They're fetching up a keel boat to the shore, Miss Betty—it's a whooper!" he announced Betty's heart sank; she never doubted the purpose for which that boat was brought into the bayou, or that it nearly concerned herself.

Half an hour later Mrs. Hicks appeared with their breakfast. It was in vain that Betty attempted to engage her in conversation. Either she cherished some personal feeling of dislike for her prisoner, or else the situation in which she herself was placed had little to recommend it, even to her dull mind, and her dissatisfaction was expressed in her attitude toward the girl.

Betty passed the long hours of morning in dreary speculation concerning what was happening at Belle Plain. In the end she realized that the day could go by and her absence occasion no alarm. Steve might reasonably suppose George had driven her into Raleigh or to the Bowns' and that she had kept the carriage. Finally all her hope centered on Judge Price. He would expect Hannibal during the morning; perhaps when the boy did not arrive he would be tempted to go out to Belle Plain to discover the reason of his non-appear-

ance. She wondered what theories would offer themselves to his ingenious mind, for she sensed something of that indomitable energy which in the face of rebuffs and laughter carried him into the thick of every sensation.

At noon Mrs. Hicks, as sullen as in the morning, brought them their dinner. She had scarcely quitted the loft when a shrill whistle pierced the silence that hung above the clearing. It was twice repeated, and the two women were heard to go from the cabin. Perhaps half an hour elapsed, then a step became audible on the packed earth of the dooryard. Some one entered the room below and began to ascend the narrow stairs, and Betty's fingers closed convulsively about Hannibal's. This was neither Mrs. Hicks nor her daughter, nor Slosson with his clumsy shuffle. There was a brief pause when the landing was reached, but it was only momentary; a hand lifted the bar, the door was thrown open, and its space framed the figure of a man. It was John Murrell.

Standing there he regarded Betty in silence, but a deep-seated fire glowed in his sunken eyes. The sense of possession was raging through him, his temples throbbed, a fever stirred his blood. Love, such as it was, he undoubtedly felt for her, and even his giant project, with all its monstrous ramifications, was lost sight of for the moment. She was the inspiration for it all, the goal and reward for which he struggled.

"Betty!" the single word fell softly from his lips. He stepped into the room, closing the door as he did so.

The girl's eyes were dilating with a mute horror, for by some swift, intuitive process of the mind, which asked nothing of the logic of events, but dealt only with conclusions, Murrell stood revealed as Norton's murderer. Perhaps he read her thoughts, but he had lived in his degenerate ambitions until the common judgments or the understanding of them no longer existed for him. That Betty had loved Norton seemed inconsequential even; it was a memory to be swept away by the force of his greater passion. So he watched her smilingly, but back of the smile was the menace of unleashed impulse.

"Can't you find some word of welcome for me, Betty?" he asked at length, still softly, still with something of entreaty in his tone.

"Then it was you—not Tom—who had me brought here?" She could have thanked God had it been Tom, whose hate was not to be feared as she feared this man's love.

"Tom—not!" and Murrell laughed. "You didn't think I'd give you up? I am standing with a halter about my neck, and all for your sake—who'd risk as much for love of you?" He seemed to expand with savage pride that this was so, and took a step toward her.

"Don't come near me!" cried Betty. Her eyes blazed, and she looked at him with loathing.

"You'll learn to be kinder," he exulted. "You wouldn't see me at Belle Plain; what was left for me but to have you brought here?"

While Murrell was speaking the signal that had told of his own presence on the opposite shore of the bayou was heard again. This served to arrest his attention. A look of uncertainty passed over his face, then he made an impatient gesture as if he dismissed some thought that had forced itself upon him, and turned to Betty.

"You don't ask what my purpose is where you are concerned; you have no curiosity on that score?" She endeavored to meet his glance with a glance as resolute, then her eyes sought the boy's upturned face. "I am going to send you down river, Betty. Later I shall join you in New Orleans, and when I leave the country you shall go with me."

"Never!" gasped Betty.

"As my wife, or however you choose to call it. I'll teach you what a man's love is like," he boasted, and extended his hand. Betty shrank from him, and his hand fell at his side. He looked at her steadily out of his deep-sunk eyes, in which blazed the fires of his passion, and as he looked, her face paled and flushed by turns. "You may learn to be kind to me, Betty," he said. "You may find it will be worth your while." Betty made no answer; she only gathered Hannibal closer to her side. "Why not accept what I have to offer, Betty?" Again he went nearer her, and again she shrank from him, but the madness of his mood was in the ascendant. He seized her and drew her to him. She struggled to free herself, but his fingers tightened about her.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Cubans Fond of Raisins.
The life of Cuba is largely sustained by raisins, its people consuming the fruit more generally than any other of the Spanish-American colonies.

DR. PRICE'S Cream BAKING POWDER

IS ABSOLUTELY HEALTHFUL

Its active principle solely grape acid and baking soda. It makes the food more delicious and wholesome.

The low priced, low grade powders put alum or lime phosphates in the food.

Ask Your Doctor About That

SOLACE IN HIS MISFORTUNE

Entombed Miner Had at Least One Pleasant Thought After Two Days of Suffering.

Miners are among the most heroic beside them, and they are schooled to believe that at any time they may come face to face with death. The result of this is that they are humorous in their boldness.

In one of the mines of Pennsylvania there was a cave in which imprisoned a miner named Jack Thornton. The accident happened on Friday afternoon, and the fellow laborers of the entombed man set to work at once to dig him out. It was not until Sunday morning, however, that they reached his prison chamber, and by this time they were wondering whether he had been suffocated or starved to death.

One of them stuck his head through the aperture made by the picks of the rescuers and called out:

"Jack, are you all right?"

"All right," came the reply, and then after a pause: "What day is this?"

"Sunday!" exclaimed the friend.

"Gee!" exclaimed Jack, "I'm glad of that. That was one Saturday night when those saloonkeepers didn't get my wages."—Popular Magazine.

They Are Overworked Now.

Four-year-old Dick had made an important discovery that his hair would pull out if enough force was exerted, and was absorbed in proving the fascinating find on his forelock. His sister—aged seven—noticed the proceedings with round-eyed horror.

"Dickie! Dickie! she cried, "you mustn't do that!"

"Why?" demanded Dickie, with the cynicism of childhood.

"Because the Bible says that all your hairs are numbered—and if you pull any out you'll make a lot of extra bookkeeping for the angels."

Simple Explanation.

To illustrate a point that he was making—that his was the race with a future and not a race with a past—Booker T. Washington told this little story the other day.

He was standing by his door one morning when old Aunt Caroline went by.

"Good morning, Aunt Caroline," he said. "Where are you going this morning?"

"Lawsee, Mista' Wash'ton," she replied. "Ise done been whar I see gwine."—Kansas City Star.

No Social Tact.

At a club dance an enthusiastic member approached a rather dull member and said to him:

"Say, for heaven's sake go over and talk to Miss Fryte. She is sitting all by herself."

"But—but what shall I say to her?"

"Tell her how pretty she is."

"But she ain't pretty."

"Well, then, tell her how ugly the other girls are. Ain't you got no social tact?"

True to His Trust.

"Father," asked the beautiful girl, "did you bring home that material for my new skirt?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Let me see? Wait now. Don't be impatient! I didn't forget it. I'm sure I've got it in one of my pockets, somewhere."

All women are more or less credulous, and some have faith in their husbands.

Nothing so completely knocks a contrary man as to have you agree with him.

"He bit the hand that fed him" said Teddy of Big Bill, And didn't tell us if the bite had made the biter ill. Now had Toasties been the subject of Bill's voracious bite He'd have come back for another with a keener appetite.

Written by WILLIAM T. HINCKES,
27 State St., Bridgeport, Conn.

One of the 50 Jingles for which the Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich., paid \$1000.00 in May.

Finance.

Stella—How do you suppose they will finance a third party?
Bella—Don't know; I can't make father pay for one.

Its Advantages.

"I think the pillory ought to be revived as punishment for this frenzied financing."

"Why so?"

"Because it provided a fitting penalty in stocks and bonds."

Important to Mothers.

Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, a safe and sure remedy for infants and children, and see that it Bears the Signature of *Dr. H. P. B. Fletcher* In Use For Over 30 Years. Children Cry for Fletcher's Castoria

The Moon's Offspring.

Looking out of the window one evening, little Marie saw the bright, full moon in the eastern sky, and, apparently, only a few inches from it, the beautiful Jupiter, shining almost as brightly as the moon itself. Marie gazed intently at the spectacle for a moment, and then, turning to her mother, exclaimed:

"Oh, mother, look! The moon has laid an egg!"

Making Cheese in Olden Days.

Cheese was made by the old-time farmers in the summer on the co-operative plan by which four cattle owners owning say 14 milk cows received all the milk night and morning, according to the daily yield of their little herd. Thus given two families having five cows each, one with three and one with one, supposing that the average yield per cow was the same, in two weeks two owners would make five cheeses each; one would press three, and one only one cheese, but this one would be as good and as large as any of the rest.—"Nobility of the Trades—The Farmer," Charles Winlow Hall, in National Magazine.

She Was a Duster.

Mrs. Sutton advertised for a woman to do general housework, and in answer a colored girl called, announcing that she had come for the position.

"Are you a good cook?" asked Mrs. Sutton.

"No, indeed, I don't cook," was the reply.

"Are you a good laundress?"

"I wouldn't do washin' and ironin'; it's too hard on the hands."

"Can you sweep?" asked Mrs. Sutton.

"No," was the positive answer. "I'm not strong enough."

"Well," said the lady of the house, quite exasperated, "may I ask what you can do?"

"I dusts," came the placid reply.—Everybody's.

A Question of Names.

In some of the country districts of Ireland it is not an uncommon thing to see cards with the owners' names chalked on to save the expense of painting. Practical jokers delight in rubbing out these signs to annoy the owners.

A constabulary sergeant one day accosted a countryman whose name had been thus wiped out unknown to him.

"Is this your cart, my good man?"

"Of course it is!" was the reply.

"Do you see anything the matter wid it?"

"I observe," said the pompous policeman, "that your name is obliterated."

"Then ye're wrong," quoth the countryman, who had never come across the long word before. "For me name's O'Flaherty, and I don't care who knows it."—Youth's Companion.