



# 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 Bladen, and Bob Yancy, a farmer, when Hannibal Wayne Hazard, a mysterious child of the old southern family, makes his appearance. Yancy to keep Hannibal, Captain Murrell, a friend of the Quintards, appears and asks questions about the boy. 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 Halam, and is discharged with costs for the plaintiff. Betty Malroy, a friend of the Quintards, has an encounter with Captain Murrell, who forces his attentions on her, and is rescued by Bruce Carrington. Betty sets out for her Tennessee home. Carrington takes the same stage. Yancy and Hannibal disappear, with Murrell on their trail.

### CHAPTER VI. (Continued.)

In the tavern the three men were drinking—Murrell with the idea that the more Yancy came under the influence of Slosson's corn whisky the easier his speculation would be managed. Mr. Yancy on his part believed that if Murrell went to bed reasonably drunk he would sleep late and give him the opportunity he coveted, to quit the tavern unobserved at break of day.

"When yo' get to feelin' like sleep, young boss, Mas'r Slosson he says I show yo' to yo' chamber." It was Slosson's boy Eph.

"Yes, you can show me my chamber," Hannibal said.

Eph secured a tin candle-stick with a half-burnt candle in it and led the way into the passage back of the bar. They mounted a flight of stairs and passed down a narrow hall. This brought them to the back of the building, and Eph pushed open the door on his right.

"This beak's yo' chamber," he said, and preceding his companion into the room, placed the candle on a chair.

The moon was rising and Hannibal went to the open window and glanced out. For a moment he considered the night, not unaffected by its beauty, then, turning from the window, he moved his bundle and rifle to the foot of the bed, where they would be out of his way, kicked off his trousers, blew out the candle and lay down. Yancy had become more and more convinced as the evening passed that Murrell was bent on getting him drunk, and suspicion mounted darkly to his brain.

"Have a drink with me!" cried Slosson, giving way to drunken laughter.

"The captain's dropped out, and I 'low it's about time fo' these here festivities to come to an end. I'm thinking some of going to bed myself," said Yancy. He kept his eyes fixed on Murrell. He realized that if the latter could prevent it he was not to leave the bar. He never shifted his glance from Murrell's face. Scowling now, the captain's eyes blazed back their challenge as he thrust his right hand under his coat.

"Fair play—I don't know who you are, but I know what you want!" said Yancy, the light in his frank gray eyes deepening. Murrell laughed and took a forward step. At the same moment Slosson snatched up a heavy club from the back of the bar and dealt Yancy a murderous blow. A single startled cry escaped the Scratch Hiller; he struck out wildly as he lurched toward Murrell, who drew his knife and drove it into his shoulder. Yancy dropped heavily to the floor.

How long the boy slept he never saw, but he awoke with a start and confused sense of things. It was very late, probably long midnight—but where was his Uncle Bob?

He sank back on his pillow intent and listening. A chilling terror that gripped him fast and would not let him go, mounted to his brain.

Where was his Uncle Bob? Why didn't he come to bed? Memories of idle tales of men foully dealt with in these lonely taverns flashed through his mind.

He slid from the bed, and for a long moment stood cold and shaking, his every sense on the alert. With infinite caution he got into his trousers and again paused to listen, since he feared his least movement might betray him. Next he secured his pack, and was ready for flight.

Encumbered by his belongings, but with no mind to sacrifice them, he stepped out upon the shed and made his way down the slant of the roof to the eaves. He tossed his bundle to the ground and going down on his knees lowered his rifle, letting the muzzle fall lightly against the side of the shed as it left his hand, then he lay flat on his stomach and, feet first, wriggled out into space. When he could no longer preserve his balance, he gave himself a shove away from the eaves and dropped clear of the building.

As he recovered himself he was sure he heard a door open and close, and threw himself prone on the ground, where the black shadow cast by the tavern hid him. At the same moment two dark figures came from about a corner of the building. He could just distinguish that they carried some heavy burden between them and that they staggered as they moved.

They passed out of sight, and breathless and palmed, Hannibal crept about a corner of the tavern. He must be sure!

Presently he heard a distant sound—a splash—surely it was a splash!

A little later the men came up the lane, to disappear in the direction of the tavern. Hannibal peered after them. His very terrors, while they wrenched and tortured him, gave him a desperate kind of courage. As the gloom hid the two men, he started forward again. He reached the end of the cornfield, climbed a fence, and entered a deadening of timber. In the long wet grass he found where the men had dragged their burden. He reached down and swept his hand to and fro—once—twice—the third time his little palm came away red and discolored.

There was the first pale premonition of dawn in the sky, and as he hurried on the light grew, and the black trunks of trees detached themselves from the white mist that filled the woods and which the dawn made visible. There was light enough for him to see that he was following the trail left by the men. He emerged upon the bank of the Elk river, white like the woods with its ghostly night sweat.

The dull beat of the child's heart quickened as he gazed out on the swift current that was hurrying on with its dreadful secret. Then the full comprehension of his loss seemed to overwhelm him and he was utterly desolate. Sobs shook him, and he dropped on his knees, holding fast to the stock of his rifle.

"Uncle Bob—Uncle Bob, come back! Can't you come back!" he wailed miserably. Presently he staggered to his feet. As he glanced about, he saw almost at his feet a dug-out, made from a single poplar log. It was secured to an overhanging branch by a length of a wild grape-vine. With one last fearful look off across the deadening in the direction of the tavern, he crept down to the water's edge and entered the canoe. In a moment, he had it free from its lashing and the rude craft was bumping along the bank in spite of his best efforts with the paddle. Then a favoring current caught it and swept it out toward the center of the stream.

### CHAPTER VII.

On the River. Betty stood under a dripping umbrella in the midst of a downpour. Just arrived by the four-horse coach

that plied regularly between Washington and Georgetown, she had found the long board platform beside the canal crowded with her fellow passengers. Suddenly she became aware of a tall, familiar figure moving through the crowd. It was Bruce Carrington. At the same moment he saw her, and with a casual air that quite deceived her, approached.

"You're leaving tonight?" he asked.

"Yes—Isn't it miserable the way it rains? And why are they so slow—why don't they hurry with that boat?"

"It's in the last lock now," explained Carrington, and gathering up Betty's hand luggage, he helped her aboard.

By the time they had reached Wheeling, Betty had quite parted with whatever superficial prejudice she might have had concerning river-men. This particular one was evidently a very nice river-man, an exception to his kind. He made choice of the steamer on which she should continue her journey, and thoughtfully chose The Nalad—a slow boat.

"I haven't a thing to offer her—this is plain madness of mine!" he kept telling himself, and then the expression of his face would become grim and determined. No more of the river for him—he'd get hold of some land and go to raising cotton; that was the way money was made.

Slow as The Nalad was, the days passed much too swiftly for him. When Memphis was reached their friendly intercourse would come to an end. There would be her brother, of whom she had occasionally spoken—he would be pretty certain to have the ideas of his class.

The days, like any other days, dwindled. The end of it all was close at hand. Another twenty-four hours and Carrington reflected there would only be good-by to say.

"We will reach New Madrid tonight," he told her. They were watching the river, under a flood of yellow moonlight.

Carrington, with his back against a stanchion, watched her discontentedly.

"You'll be mighty glad to have this over with, Miss Malroy," he said at length, with a comprehensive sweep toward the river.

"Yes—shan't you?" she opened her eyes questioningly.

"No," said Carrington with a short laugh, drawing a chair near hers and sitting down.

Betty, in surprise, gave him a quick look, and then as quickly glanced away from what she encountered in his eyes. As she looked, suddenly pale points of light appeared on a distant headland.

"Is that New Madrid—Oh, is it, Mr. Carrington?" she cried eagerly.

"I reckon so," but he did not alter his position.

"But you're not looking!" "Yes, I am—I'm looking at you. I reckon you'll think me crazy, Miss Malroy—presumptuous and all that—"

but I wish Memphis could be wiped off the map, and that we could go on like this for ever!"

"You mustn't talk so—I am nothing to you—"

"Yes, you are. You're everything to me," said Carrington doggedly. "You shall love me—" She was powerless in his embrace. She felt his breath on her cheek, then he kissed her. Suddenly his arms fell at his side; his face was white. "I was a brute to do that—Betty, forgive me! I am sorry—no, I can't be sorry!"

They were alongside the New Madrid wharf now, and a certain young man who had been impatiently watching The Nalad's lights ever since they became visible crossed the gang-plank with a bound.

"Betty—why in the name of goodness did you ever choose this tub?" said the new-comer.

"Charley!" Carrington stepped back. This must be the brother who had come up the river from Memphis to meet her—but her brother's name was Tom!

He looked this stranger—this Charley—over with a hostile eye, offended by his good looks, his confident manner, in which he thought he detected an air of ownership, as if—certainly he was holding her hands longer than was necessary. An instant later, when Betty, remembering, turned to speak to him, his place by the rail was deserted.

All that day Hannibal was haunted by the memory of what he had heard and seen at Slosson's tavern. More than this, there was his terrible sense of loss, and the grief he could not master. Marking the course of the road westward, he clung to the woods, where his movements were as stealthy as the very shadows themselves.

Presently, as he stumbled forward, he came to a small clearing in the center of which stood a log dwelling. The place seemed deserted.

Tilted back in a chair by the door of this house a man was sleeping. The hoot of an owl from a nearby oak roused him. He yawned and stretched himself, thrusting out his fat legs and extending his great arms. Then becoming aware of that path as he slept and now stood, before him in the uncertain light, he fell to rubbing his eyes with the small figure which had stolen up the knuckles of his plump hands.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm Hannibal Wayne Hazard," said the boy. The man quitted his chair.

"Well—I am glad to know you, Hannibal Wayne Hazard. I am Slocum Price—Judge Slocum Price, sometime major-general of militia and ex-member of congress, to mention a few of those honors my fellow countrymen have thrust upon me." He made a sweeping gesture with his two hands outspread and bowed ponderously.

The boy saw a man of sixty, whose gross and battered visage told its own story. There was a sparse white frost about his ears; and his eyes, pale blue and prominent, looked out from under beetling brows. He wore a shabby plum-colored coat and tight, drab breeches. About his fat neck was a black stock, with just a suggestion of soiled linen showing above it. His figure was corpulent and unwieldy.

"You don't belong in these parts, do you?" asked the judge, when he had completed his scrutiny.

"No, sir," answered the boy. He glanced off down the road, where lights were visible among the trees. "What town is that?"

"Pleasantville—which is a lie—but I am neither sufficiently drunk nor sufficiently sober to cope with the possibilities your question offers. Have you so much as fifty cents about you?" and the judge's eyes narrowed to a slit above their folds of puffy flesh. Hannibal, keeping his glance fixed on the man's face, fell back a step. "I can't let you go if you are penniless—I can't do that!" cried the judge, with sudden vehemence. "You shall be my guest for the night. They're a pack of thieves at the tavern," he lowered his voice. "I know 'em, for they've plucked me!" He rested a fat hand on the boy's shoulder and drew him gently but firmly into the shanty. With flint and steel he made a light, and presently a candle was sputtering in his hands. He fitted it into the neck of a tall bottle, and as the light flared up the boy glanced about him.

The interior was mean enough, with its rough walls, dirt floor and black, cavernous fireplace. A shakedown bed in one corner of the room was tastefully screened from the public gaze by a tattered quilt.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Peccoliar. "One o' de mos' curious things about a fool," said Uncle Eben, "is de way he'll holler and git mad if you don't let him show off his misfortune."

### STATE TAKES HAND IN FIGHT

New Jersey Leads in Advanced Legislation Designed to Check Spread of Tuberculosis.

What is designated by the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis as the most advanced legislation in the campaign against tuberculosis that has been enacted by any state in the United States, if not by any country in the world, is found in a bill recently passed by the New Jersey legislature and signed by Governor Wilson. The new law provides that tuberculosis patients who refuse to obey the regulations laid down by the state board of health concerning the prevention of the disease, and thus become a menace to the health of those with whom they associate shall be compulsorily segregated by order of the courts, in institutions provided for this purpose. If such a patient refuses to obey the rules and regulations of the institution in which he is placed, he may "be isolated or separated from other persons and restrained from leaving the institution." The law further provides that all counties in the state of New Jersey shall within six months from April 1st make provision in special institutions for the care of all persons having tuberculosis in these counties. The state treasurer will subsidize each county to the extent of \$3.00 a week for each person maintained in these institutions, except those who are able to pay for the cost of maintenance.

### Missing the Point.

Representative Rucker of Colorado, apropos of a tariff argument about sugar, said to a Washington correspondent: "Oh, well, those men don't see my point. They miss it as badly as the old lady missed her son's."

"Mother," a young man said, looking up from the Bulletin, "would you believe that it takes 5,000 elephants a year to make our piano keys and billiard balls?"

"Make our piano keys and billiard balls!" cried the old lady. "Well, I always understood elephants were intelligent creatures, but I never knew before that they'd been trained to make piano keys and billiard balls."

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### They Draw Interest.

"A kiss," he said after just having had one, "is the most precious thing, and yet women give them away."

"You are mistaken," she said. "We never give them away, we merely invest them."—Fun.

### Not Telling All of it.

"Does your fiance know your age, Little?"

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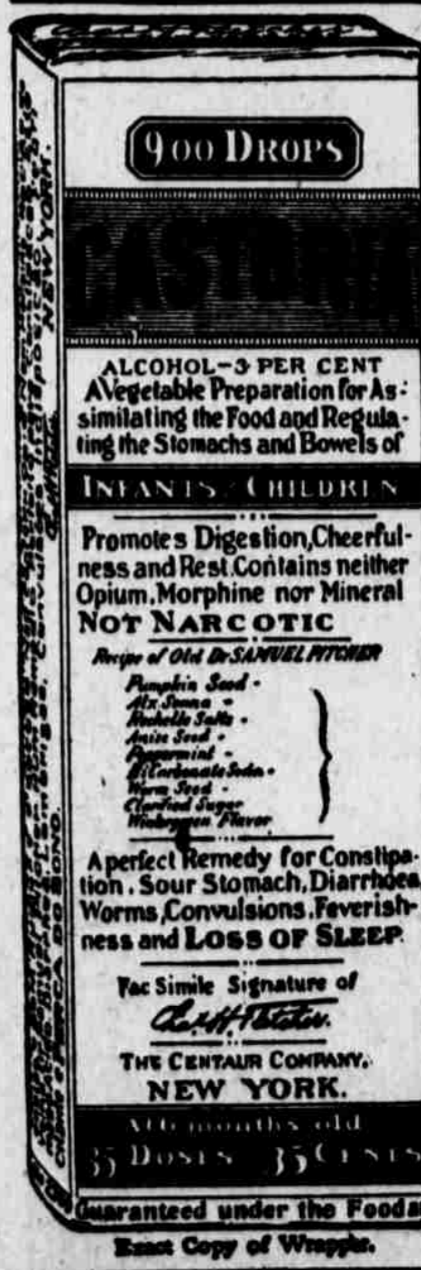
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