



THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

By VAUGHAN KESTER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY D. MELVILL



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 tells how he adopted the boy. Nathaniel Ferris buys the Barony, but the Quintards deny any knowledge of the boy. Yancy to keep Hannibal, Captain Murrell, a friend of the Quintards, appears and asks questions about the Barony. 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 Judge Price, and is discharged with costs for the plaintiff. Betty Malroy, a friend of the Ferrises, has an encounter with Captain Murrell, who forces his attentions on her, and is rescued by Bruce Carrington. Carrington takes the same stage as Murrell and Hannibal arrives at the home of Judge Slocum Price. The Judge recognizes in the boy the grandson of an old time 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 rifle discloses some startling things to the judge. Hannibal and Betty meet again. Murrell arrives in Belle Plain. Carrington is playing for big stakes. Yancy awakes from long dreamless sleep on board the raft. Judge Price makes startling discovery in looking up land titles. Charley Norton, a young planter, who assists the judge, is mysteriously assaulted. Norton informs Carrington that Betty has promised to marry him.

CHAPTER XIV—(Continued).

The stranger, his business concluded, swung about on his heel and quitted the office. Mr. Saul, bending above his desk, was making an entry in one of his ledgers. The judge shuffled to his side.

"Who was that man?" he asked thickly, resting a shaking hand on the clerk's arm.

"That?—Oh, that was Colonel Ferris. I was just telling you about."

"Has he always lived here?"

"No; he came into the county about ten years ago, and bought a place called The Oaks."

"Has he—a family?" The judge appeared to be having difficulty with his speech.

"Not that anybody knows of. Some say he's a widower, others again say he's an old bachelor; but he don't say nothing. The colonel's got his friends, to be sure, but he don't mix much with the real quality. One of his particular intimates is a gentleman by the name of Murrell."

The judge nodded.

"I've met him," he said briefly.

Acting on a sudden impulse, the judge muttered something about returning later, and hastily quitted the office.

In the hall the judge's steps dragged and his head was bowed. He was busy with his memories. Then passion shook him.

"Damn him—may God—for ever damn him!" he cried under his breath, in a fierce whisper.

They finished supper, the dishes were cleared away and the candles lighted, when the judge produced a mysterious leather-covered case. This he opened, and Mahaffy and Hannibal saw that it held a handsome pair of dueling pistols.

"Where did you get 'em, Judge?—Oh, ain't they beautiful!" cried Hannibal, circling about the table in his excitement.

"My dear lad, they were purchased only a few hours ago," said the judge quietly, as he began to load them.

CHAPTER XV.

At the Church Door.

Tom found Betty at supper.

"You were over to see Norton, weren't you, Bet? How did you find him?"

"The doctor says he will soon be about again."

"Betty, I wish you wouldn't go there again—that's a good girl!" he said tactfully, and as he conceived it, affectionately. Betty glanced up quickly.

"Why, Tom, why shouldn't I go there?"

"It might set people gossiping. I reckon there's been pretty near enough talk about you and Charley Norton." The planter's tone was conciliatory in the extreme, he dared not risk a break by any open show of authority.

"You needn't distress yourself, Tom. I don't know that I shall go there again," said Betty indifferently.

CHAPTER XVI.

The long French windows, their curtains drawn, stood open. There was the sound of a step on the path. Betty turned. It was Carrington who stood before her, his face haggard. Without a word he stepped to her side and took her hands rather roughly.

"Now, what do you wish to say to me?" he asked.

"We want your word that you'll keep away from Belle Plain."

"Well, you won't get it!" responded Norton.

In the same instant one of the men raised his fist and struck the young planter in the back of the neck.

"You cur!" cried Norton, as he wheeled on him.

"Damn him—let him have it!"

It was mid-afternoon of the day following before Betty heard of the attack on Norton. She ordered her horse saddled and was soon out on the river road with a groom in her wake. Betty never drew rein until she reached Thicket Point. As she galloped into the yard Bruce Carrington came from the house.

"How is Mr. Norton?" she asked, extending her hand.

"The doctor says he'll be up and about inside of a week. If you'll wait I'll tell him you are here."

Carrington passed on into the house. He entered the room where Norton lay.

"Miss Malroy is here," he said.

"Betty?—bless her dear heart!" cried Charley weakly. "Just toss my clothes into the closet and draw up a chair."

There—thank you, Bruce—let her come along in now."

And as Carrington quitted the room, Norton drew himself up on the pillows and faced the door. "This is worth several beatings, Betty!" he exclaimed as she appeared.

He bent to kiss the hand she gave him, but groaned with the exertion. Then he looked up into her face and saw her eyes swimming with tears.

"What—tears?" and he was much moved.

"It's a perfect outrage!" Betty paused irresolutely. "Charley—"

"Yes, dear?"

"Can't you be happy without me?"

"No."

"But you don't try to be!"

"No use in my making any such foolish effort, I'd be doomed to failure."

"Good-by, Charley—I really must go—"

He looked up yearningly into her face, and yielding to a sudden impulse, she stooped and kissed him on the forehead, then she fled from the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

"What am I to do without you?"—his voice was almost a whisper.

"What is this thing you have done?" Betty's heart was beating with dull sickening throbs.

"If you had only come!" she moaned. "Now I am going to be married tomorrow. I am to meet him at the Spring Bank church at ten o'clock."

"How can I give you up?" he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. He put her from him almost roughly, and leaning against the trunk of a tree buried his face in his hands. Betty watched him for a moment in wretched silence.

"It's good-by—" he muttered.

She went to him, and, as he bent above her, slipped her arms about his neck.

"Kiss me—" she breathed.

He kissed her hair, her soft cheek, then their lips met.

Another hot September sun was beating upon the earth as Betty galloped down the lane and swung her horse's head in the direction of Raleigh. She would keep her promise to Charley and he should never know what his happiness had cost her.

Norton joined her before she had covered a third of the distance that separated the two plantations.

"We are to go to the church. Mr. Bowen will be there; I arranged with him last night; he will drive over with his wife and daughter, who will be our witnesses, dear."

Afterward Betty could remember standing before the church in the fierce morning light; she heard Mr. Bowen's voice, she heard Charley's voice, she heard another voice—her own, though she scarcely recognized it.

"I'll tie the horses, Betty," said Norton.

He had reached the edge of the oaks when from the silent depths of the denser woods came the sharp report of a rifle. The shock of the bullet sent the young fellow staggering back among the mossy and myrtle-covered graves.

For a moment no one grasped what had happened, only there was Norton who seemed to grope strangely among the graves. He had fallen now. Even as the shadows deepened he was aware that Betty was coming swiftly toward him.

"I'm shot—" he said, speaking with difficulty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

For two or three days bands of armed men scoured the woods and roads, and then this activity quite unproductive of any tangible results ceased, matters were allowed to rest with the constituted authorities, namely Mr. Betts, the sheriff, and his deputies.

No private citizen had shown greater zeal than Judge Slocum Price. One morning he found under his door a folded paper:

"You talk too much. Shut up, or you'll go where Norton went."

A few moments later he burst in on Mr. Saul.

"Glance at that, my friend!" he cried, as he tossed the paper on the clerk's desk. "What do you make of it, sir?"

"Well, I'd keep still."

The judge laughed derisively as he bowed himself out.

He established himself in his office. He had scarcely done so when Mr. Betts knocked at the door. The sheriff came direct from Mr. Saul and arrived out of breath, but the letter was not mentioned by the judge. He spoke of the crops, the chance of rain, and the intricacies of county politics. The sheriff withdrew mystified, wondering why it was he had not felt at liberty to broach the subject which was uppermost in his mind.

His place was taken by Mr. Pegloe and on the heels of the tavern-keeper came Mr. Bowen. Judge Price received them with condescension, but back of the condescension was an air of reserve that did not invite questions. The judge discussed the extension of the national roads with Mr. Pegloe, and the religion of the Persian fire-worshippers with Mr. Bowen; he permitted never a pause and they retired as the sheriff had done without sight of the letter.

The judge's office became a perfect Mecca for the idle and the curious, and while he overflowed with high-bred courtesy he had never seemed so unapproachable—never so remote from matters of local and contemporary interest.

"Why don't you show 'em the letter?" demanded Mr. Mahaffy, when they were alone. "Can't you see they are suffering for a sight of it?"

"All in good time, Solomon." He became thoughtful. "Solomon, I am thinking of offering a reward for any information that will lead to the discovery of my anonymous correspondent," he at length observed with a finely casual air, as if the idea had



CHAPTER XIX.

"Charley—Charley!" she moaned, slipping her arms about him and gathering him to her breast.

He looked up into her face.

"It's all over—" he said, but as much in wonder as in fear. "But I knew you could come to me—dear—" he added in a whisper.

She felt a shudder pass through him. He did not speak again.

CHAPTER XX.

The Judge Offers a Reward.

The news of Charley Norton's murder spread quickly over the county.

DR. PRICE'S Baking Powder

Cream
PURE-WHOLESOME-RELIABLE

MADE FROM CREAM OF TARTAR DERIVED SOLELY FROM GRAPES, THE MOST DELICIOUS AND WHOLE-SOME OF ALL FRUIT ACIDS

Its superiority is unquestioned
Its fame world-wide
Its use a protection and a guarantee against alum food

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Alum baking powders are classed by physicians detrimental to health. Many consumers use alum baking powders unaware. They are allured to the danger by the cry of cheapness, by fake tests and exhibitions and false and flippant advertisements in the newspapers. Alum baking powders do not make a "pure, wholesome and delicious food" any more than two and two make ten.

READ THE LABEL
and decline to buy or use any baking powder that is not plainly designated as a cream of tartar powder.

Less and Less.
"This is a great age we are living in," said Brinkley. "We have smokeless gunpowder, horseless wagons, wireless telegraph—"

Piecing Out.
"Writing a story?" the caller asked the busy author.
"Yes; in dialect."
"I didn't think you ever made use of dialect."
"I don't as a rule, but I have to now. Several letters are broken on my typewriter."

A Hint.
Knicker—Did you explain baseball to your girl?
Bocker—Yes; she said she understood all about diamonds.

The Worst of It.
"Do you keep a cook, Mrs. Subub?"
"Madam, I not only keep the cook, but also her entire family."

Too Favorable a Description.
"That man is a pinhead."
"You flatter him. A pinhead knows just how far to go."

Cole's Carbolic Salve
Relieves and cures itching, torturing diseases of the skin and mucous membranes. A superior File Cure. 25c and 50c bottles, by druggists. For free sample write to J. W. Cole & Co., Black River Falls, Wis.

It Does.
"Do you find this presidential preferential primary puzzling?"
"Well, it makes you mind your p's."

Smokers and LEWIS' Single Binder
Single Binder to cigar better quality than most 10c cigars.

Liver and kidney complaints will be greatly helped by taking Garfield Tea regularly.

A good memory is essential to a successful liar.

Here's The Road to Comfort
A vanished thirst—a cool body and a refreshed one; the sure way—the only way is via a glass or bottle of

Coca-Cola

Ideally delicious—pure as purity—crisp and sparkling as frost.
Free Our new booklet, telling of Coca-Cola vindication at Chattanooga, for the asking. Demand the Genuine as made by THE COCA-COLA CO., ATLANTA, GA.