



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 its 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 Justice Hickam, 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. Betty sets out for her Tennessee home. Carrington takes the same stage. Yancy and Hannibal disappear, with Murrell on their trail. 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 riddle discloses some startling things to the Judge. Hannibal and Betty meet again. Murrell arrives in Belle Plain. Is playing for big stakes. Yancy awakes from long dream sleep on board the raft. Judge Price makes startling discoveries 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. 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.

CHAPTER XVIII (Continued).

"Miss Betty, he's just like my Uncle Bob was—he ain't afraid of nothing! He totes them pistols of his—loaded—if you notice good you can see where they bulge out his coat!" Hannibal's eyes, very round and big, looked up into hers.

"Is he as poor as he seems, Hannibal?" inquired Betty.

"He never has no money, Miss Betty, but I don't reckon he's what a body would call poor."

It might have baffled a far more mature intelligence than Hannibal's to comprehend those peculiar processes by which the Judge sustained himself and his intimate fellowship with adversity—that it was his magnificence of mind which made the squalor of his daily life seem merely a passing phase—but the boy had managed to point a delicate distinction, and Betty grasped something of the hope and faith which never quite died out in Slocum Price's indomitable breast.

"But you always have enough to eat, dear?" she questioned anxiously. Hannibal promptly reassured her on this point. "You wouldn't let me think anything that was not true, Hannibal—you are quite sure you have never been hungry?"

"Never, Miss Betty; honest!" Betty gave a sigh of relief. She had been reproaching herself for her neglect of the child; she had meant to do so much for him and had done nothing! Now it was too late for her personally to interest herself in his behalf, yet before she left for the east she would provide for him. If she had felt it was possible to trust the Judge she would have made him her agent, but even in his best aspect he seemed a dubious dependence. Tom, for quite different reasons, was equally out of the question. She thought of Mr. Mahaffy.

"What kind of a man is Mr. Mahaffy, Hannibal?"

"He's an awful nice man, Miss Betty, only he never lets on; a body's got to find it out for his own self—he ain't like the Judge."

"Does he—drink, too, Hannibal?" questioned Betty.

"Oh, yes; when he can get the lick he does." It was evident that Hannibal was cheerfully tolerant of this weakness on the part of the austere Mahaffy. By this time Betty was ready to sweep over the child, with his knowledge of shabby vice, and his fresh young faith in those old tattered demagogues.

"But, no matter what they do, they are very, very kind to you?" she continued tremulously.

"Yes, ma'am—why, Miss Betty, they're lovely men!"

"And do you ever hear the things spoken of you learned about at Mrs. Ferris' Sunday-school?"

"When the Judge is drunk he talks a heap about 'em. It's beautiful to hear him there; you'd love it, Miss Betty," and Hannibal smiled up sweetly into her face.

"Does he have you go to Sunday-school in Raleigh?"

"The boy shook his head."

"I ain't got no clothes that's fitten to wear, nor no pennies to give, but the Judge, he 'lows that as soon as he can make a raise I got to go, and he's learning me my letters—but we ain't a book. Miss Betty, I reckon it'd stump you some to guess how he's fixed it for me to learn?"

"He's drawn the letters for you, is that the way?" In spite of herself, Betty was experiencing a certain revulsion of feeling where the Judge and

Mahaffy were concerned. They were doubtless bad enough, but they could have been worse.

"No, ma'am; he done soaked the label off one of Mr. Pegloe's whisky bottles and pasted it on the wall just as high as my chin, so's I can see it good, and he's learning me that-a-way! Maybe you've seen the kind of bottle I mean—Pegloe's Mississippi Pilot; Pure Corn Whisky?" But Hannibal's bright little face fell. He was quick to see that the educational system devised by the Judge did not impress Betty at all favorably. She drew him into her arms.

"You shall have my books—the books I learned to read out of when I was a little girl, Hannibal!"

"I like learning from the label pretty well," said Hannibal loyally.

"But you'll like the books better, dear, when you see them. I know just where they are, for I happened on them on a shelf in the library only the other day."

After they had found and examined the books and Hannibal had grudgingly admitted that they might possess certain points of advantage over the label, he and Betty went out for a walk. It was now late afternoon and the sun was sinking behind the wall of the forest that rose along the Arkansas coast. Their steps had led them to the terrace—where they stood looking off into the west. It was here that Betty had said good-by to Bruce Carrington—it might have been months ago, and it was only days. She thought of Charley—Charley, with his youth and hope, and high courage—unwittingly enough she had led him on to his death! A sob rose in her throat.

Hannibal looked up into her face. The memory of his own loss was never very long absent from his mind, and Miss Betty had been the victim of a similarly sinister tragedy.



"You Needn't Be Afraid, I Got Something Important to Say."

He recalled those first awful days of loneliness through which he had lived, when there was no Uncle Bob—soft-voiced, smiling and infinitely companionable.

"Why, Hannibal, you are crying—what about, dear?" asked Betty suddenly.

"No, ma'am; I ain't crying," said Hannibal stoutly, but his wet lashes gave the lie to his words.

"Are you homesick—do you wish to go back to the Judge and Mr. Mahaffy?"

"No, ma'am—it ain't that—I was just thinking—"

"Thinking about what, dear?"

"About my Uncle Bob." The small face was very wistful.

"Oh—and you still miss him so much, Hannibal?"

"I bet I do—I reckon anybody who knew Uncle Bob would never get over missing him; they just couldn't, Miss Betty! The Judge is mighty kind, and so is Mr. Mahaffy—they're awful kind, Miss Betty, and it seems like they get kinder all the time—but

with Uncle Bob, when he liked you, he just laid himself out to let you know it!"

"That does make a great difference, doesn't it?" agreed Betty sadly, and two piteous tearful eyes were bent upon him.

"Don't you reckon if Uncle Bob is alive, like the Judge says, and he's ever going to find me, he had ought to be here by now?" continued Hannibal anxiously.

"But it hasn't been such a great while, Hannibal; it's only that so much has happened to you. If he was very badly hurt it may have been weeks before he could travel; and then when he could, perhaps he went back to that tavern to try to learn what had become of you. But we may be quite certain he will never abandon his search until he has made every possible effort to find you, dear! That means he will sooner or later come to west Tennessee, for there will always be the hope that you have found your way here."

"Sometimes I get mighty tired waiting, Miss Betty," confessed the boy. "Seems like I just couldn't wait no longer—" He sighed gently, and then his face cleared. "You reckon he'll come most any time, don't you, Miss Betty?"

"Yes, Hannibal; any day or hour!" "Whoop!" muttered Hannibal softly under his breath. Presently he asked: "Where does that branch take you to?" He nodded toward the bayou at the foot of the terraced bluff.

"It empties into the river," answered Betty.

Hannibal saw a small skiff beached among the cottonwoods that grew along the water's edge and his eyes lighted up instantly. He had a juvenile passion for boats.

"Why, you got a boat, ain't you, Miss Betty?" This was a charming and an important discovery.

with a startled exclamation, and Hannibal felt her fingers close convulsively about his. The sound she had heard might have been only the rustling of the wind among the branches overhead in that shadowy silence, but Betty's nerves, the placid nerves of youth and perfect health, were shattered.

"Didn't you hear something, Hannibal?" she whispered fearfully.

For answer Hannibal pointed mysteriously, and glancing in the direction he indicated, Betty saw a woman advancing along the path toward them. The look of alarm slowly died out of his eyes.

"I think it's the overseer's niece," she told Hannibal, and they kept on toward the boat.

The girl came rapidly up the path, which closely followed the irregular line of the shore in its windings. Once she was seen to stop and glance back over her shoulder, her attitude intent and listening, then she hurried forward again. Just at the boat the three met.

"Good evening!" said Betty pleasantly.

The girl made no reply to this; she merely regarded Betty with a fixed stare. At length she broke the silence abruptly.

"I got something I want to say to you—you know who I am, I reckon?" She was a girl of about Betty's own age, with a certain dark, sullen beauty and that physical attraction which Tom, in spite of his vexed mood, had taken note of earlier in the day.

"You are Bess Hicks," said Betty.

"Make the boy go back toward the house a spell—I got something I want to say to you," Betty hesitated. She was offended by the girl's manner, which was as rude as her speech. "I ain't going to hurt you—you needn't be afraid of me. I got something important to say—send him off, I tell you; there ain't no time to lose!" The girl stamped her foot impatiently.

Betty made a sign to Hannibal and he passed slowly back along the path. He went unwillingly, and he kept his head turned that he might see what was done, even if he were not to hear what was said.

"That will do, Hannibal—wait there—don't go any farther!" Betty called after him when he had reached a point sufficiently distant to be out of hearing of a conversation carried on in an ordinary tone. "Now, what is it? Speak quickly if you have anything to tell me!"

"I got a heap to say," answered the girl with a scowl. Her manner was still fierce and repellent, and she gave Betty a certain jealous regard out of her black eyes which the latter was at a loss to explain. "Where's Mr. Tom?" she demanded.

"Tom? Why, about the place, I suppose—in his office, perhaps." So it had to do with Tom. . . . Betty felt sudden disgust with the situation.

"No, he ain't about the place, either! He done struck out for Memphis two hours after sun-up, and what's more, he ain't coming back here to-night—" There was a moment of silence. The girl looked about apprehensively. She continued, fixing her black eyes on Betty: "You're here alone at Belle Plain—you know what happened when Mr. Tom started for Memphis last time—I reckon you ain't forgot that!"

Betty felt a pallor steal over her face. She rested a hand that shook on the trunk of a tree to steady herself. The girl laughed shortly.

"Don't be so scared; I reckon Belle Plain's as good as his if anything happened to you?"

By a great effort Betty gained a measure of control over herself. She took a step nearer and looked the girl steadily in the face.

"Perhaps you will stop this sort of talk, and tell me what is going to happen to me—if you know?" she said quietly.

"Why do you reckon Mr. Norton was shot? I can tell you why—it was all along of you—that was why!" The girl's furtive glance, which searched and watched the gathering shadows, came back as it always did to Betty's pale face. "You ain't no safer than he was, I tell you!" and she sucked in her breath sharply between her full red lips.

"What do you mean?" faltered Betty.

"Do you reckon you're safe here in the big house alone? Why do you reckon Mr. Tom cleared out for Memphis? It was because he couldn't be around and have anything happen to you—that was why!" and the girl sank her voice to a whisper. "You quit Belle Plain now—tonight—just as soon as you can!"

"This is absurd—you are trying to frighten me!"

"Did they stop with trying to frighten Charley Norton?" demanded Bess, with harsh insistence.

They had entered the scattering timber when Betty paused suddenly

with a startled exclamation, and Hannibal felt her fingers close convulsively about his. The sound she had heard might have been only the rustling of the wind among the branches overhead in that shadowy silence, but Betty's nerves, the placid nerves of youth and perfect health, were shattered.

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MANY WEIGHTS ARE DEFICIENT

Secretary Houck Tells Sealers of Measures of Fraud Practices

MEET FOR ORGANIZATION

Plans to Reduce High Cost of Living—Buyers Must Get What They Pay For—Association of County and City Officials.

(Special Harrisburg Correspondence.) Harrisburg—Plans were formulated here to decrease the high cost of living by seeing that consumers pay, in quantity at least, what they get for. The matter was taken up at the first session of the sealers of weights and measures of the State that have so far availed themselves of the provisions of the sealer act of 1911. There are now 40 sealers in the State, and half of them attended the opening session. The fact was pointed out during the discussions of the day that the sealers have no authority to do anything but standardize weights and measures, and that where they find dealers who purposely or unconsciously sell underweight or undermeasure they cannot be brought to book for it. As a result, additional legislation will be asked of the next session of the Legislature. Chief James Sweeney, of the Bureau of Standards, of the Department of Internal Affairs, opened the meeting, and Governor Tener and Secretary of Internal Affairs Houck made addresses. The Governor spoke of the importance of the work of the sealers and said it is necessary that the housekeeper be protected from fraud through their work. Secretary Houck said that during the 11 months since the bureau was created 1264 weights and measures had been standardized for local sealers. He advocated monthly reports to the bureau, saying that a few of the most active men in the service are now making reports to Chief Sweeney, although such reports are not compulsory. The sealers making these reports have tested, he said, 47,967 weights and measures in their districts and found 11,788 deficient. A number of short dry and liquid measures and short weights were exhibited by Chief Sweeney, and he demonstrated how a huckster, in selling potatoes, measured by a one-peck measure, which really contained but three-quarters of a peck, could make an illegal profit of \$700 annually.

Spread of Smallpox. State Health Commissioner Samuel G. Dixon, after getting in touch by telephone with his representatives at Pittsburgh and Carbondale, made the following statement of the spread of smallpox in these places: "The state is advising with Dr. Edwards, who is acting as director of the public health department of Pittsburgh. All cases not in the hospital are now being guarded both day and night. The disease is of a virulent type. Chickenpox is now being reported, as the law requires, and the diagnosis is being checked off by the city authorities. There are several nuclei of infection, therefore we must expect more cases. The spread at Carbondale was because of failure of differentiation between chickenpox and smallpox and an absolute disregard by the local authorities of the state law which requires the quarantine of chickenpox. The state has taken charge because of a disagreement, and wants a united action between the Board of Health and the City Council. We believe we have the epidemic well in hand."

Reading Company Answers. The Reading Transit Company has filed with the State Railroad Commission an answer to the complaint of Z. L. Spangler, of Wernersville, concerning overcrowding of the first morning car from Wernersville to Reading. The company admits that the car is crowded and in relief thereof has added another car from Wernersville, leaving at the same time as the one complained of. It is denied that the fare of 15 cents is excessive, as it will carry a passenger about 11 1/2 miles if he desires. The same company, in answering the complaint of B. Franklin Brosman, that cars do not stop on the Womelsdorf division between Trent avenue and Reading boulevard, says that the distance between these points is about 570 feet—all on a 7 per cent. grade—and this makes frequent stops undesirable and impossible if the schedule desired by the suburban residents is to be maintained.

Perry Centennial 1914. Auditor General A. E. Sisson, who has returned from a visit to Lake Erie with members of the Perry Centennial Commission, says that plans are being rapidly worked out.

Spanked His Wife. Edward Miller, a foreigner, who is employed about coach and wagon shops, was before Alderman Spayd at the police station, charged with spanking his 25-year-old wife, a comely German girl. According to the wife, the husband did not go to work in the morning, but bought a pint of whiskey and drank it, and then went out and got another pint, and almost finished that, when she interfered, and was seized by her husband, thrown across his knees and spanked with a slipper. He was fined \$10.

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