



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, 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 Squire Balaam, and is discharged with costs for the plaintiff, Betty Malroy, the wife 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 Sloum 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 ride discloses some startling things to the Judge. Hannibal and Betty meet again. Murrell arrives in Belle Plain. He is playing for big stakes. Yancy awakes from long dream-like 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. Norton is mysteriously shot. More light on Murrell's plot. He plans upholding 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. Betty consents to leave Belle Plain at once. Betty, terrified, acts on Bess' advice, and on their way their carriage is stopped at the tavern keeper, and a confederate, and Betty and Hannibal are made prisoners. The pair are taken to a "hick" cabin, in an almost inaccessible spot, and there Murrell visits Betty and reveals his part in the plot and his object. Betty spins his proffered love and the interview is ended by the arrival of Ware, terrified at possible outcome of the trial. Judge Price, hearing of the abduction, plans action. The Judge takes charge of the situation, and search for the missing ones is instituted. Carrington visits the judge and allies are discovered. Judge Price visits Colonel Ferris, where he meets Yancy and Cavendish.

CHAPTER XXIV. (Continued).

When they entered the library Ferris turned and took stock of his guests. Mahaffy he had seen before; Yancy and Cavendish were of course strangers to him, but their appearance explained them; last of all his glance shifted to the judge. He had heard something of those activities by means of which Sloum Price had striven to distinguish himself, and he had a certain curiosity respecting the man. It was immediately satisfied. The judge had reached a degree of shabbiness seldom equaled, and but for his mellow, effulgent personality might well have passed for a common vagabond; and if his dress advertised the state of his finances, his face explained his habits. No misconception was possible about either.

"May I offer you a glass of liquor?" asked Ferris, breaking the silence. He stepped to the walnut center-table where there was a decanter and glasses. By a gesture the judge declined the invitation. Whereat the colonel looked surprised, but not so surprised as Mahaffy. There was another silence.

"I don't think we ever met before?" observed Ferris. There was something in the fixed stare his visitor was bending upon him that he found disquieting, just why, he could not have told.

But that fixed stare of the judge's continued. No, the man had not changed—he had grown older certainly, but age had not come ungracefully; he became the glossy broadcloth and spotless linen he wore. Here was a man who could command the good things of life, using them with a rational temperance. The room itself was in harmony with his character; it was plain but rich in its appointments at once his library and his office, while the well-filled cases ranged about the walls showed his tastes to be in the main scholarly and intellectual.

"How long have you lived here?" asked the judge abruptly. Ferris seemed to hesitate; but the judge's glance, compelling and insistent, demanded an answer.

"Ten years."

"You have known many men of all classes as a lawyer and a planter?" said the judge. Ferris inclined his head. The judge took a step nearer him. "People have a great trick of coming and going in these western states—all sorts of damned riffraff drift in and out of these new lands." A deadly earnestness lifted the judge's words above mere rudeness. Ferris, cold and distant, made no reply.

"For the past twenty years I have been looking for a man by the name of Gatewood—David Gatewood." Disciplined as he was, the colonel started violently. "Ever heard of him, Ferris?" demanded the judge with a savage scowl.

"What's all this to me?" The words came with a gasp from Ferris' twitching lips. The judge looked at him moody and frowning.

"I have reason to think this man Gatewood came to west Tennessee," he said.

"If so, I have never heard of him."

"Perhaps not under that name—at any rate, you are going to hear of him now. This man Gatewood, who between ourselves was a damned scoundrel—the colonel winced—"this man Gatewood had a friend who threw money and business in his way—a planter he was, same as Gatewood. A sort of partnership existed between the pair. It proved an expensive enterprise for Gatewood's friend, since he came to trust the damned scoundrel more and more as time passed—even large sums of his money were in Gatewood's hands—" Ferris' countenance was like stone, as expressionless and as rigid.

By the door stood Mahaffy with Yancy and Cavendish; they understood that what was obscure and meaningless to them held a tragic significance to these two men. The judge's heavy face, ordinarily battered and debauched, but infinitely good-natured, bore now the markings of deep passion, and the voice that rumbled forth from his capacious chest came to their ears like distant thunder.

"This friend of Gatewood's had a wife—" The judge's voice broke, emotion shook him like a leaf; he was tearing open his wounds. He reached over and poured himself a drink, sucking it down with greedy lips. "There was a wife—" he whirled about on his heel and faced Ferris again. "There was a wife, Ferris—" he fixed Ferris with his blazing eyes. "A wife and child. Well, one day Gatewood and the wife were missing. Under the circumstances Gatewood's friend was well rid of the pair—he should have been grateful, but he wasn't, for his wife took his child, a daughter; and Gatewood a trifle of thirty thousand dollars his friend had entrusted to him."

There was another silence.

"At a later day I met this man who had been betrayed by his wife and robbed by his friend. He had fallen out of the race—drink had done for him—there was just one thing he seemed to care about, and that was the fate of his child, but maybe he was only curious there. He wondered if she had lived, and married—" Once more the judge paused.

"What's all this to me?" asked Ferris.

"Are you sure it's nothing to you?" demanded the judge hoarsely. "Understand this, Ferris, Gatewood's treachery brought ruin to at least two lives. It caused the woman's father to hide his face from the world; it wasn't enough for him that his friends believed his daughter dead; he knew differently, and the shame of that knowledge ate into his soul. It cost the husband his place in the world, too—in the end it made of him a vagabond and a penniless wanderer."

"This is nothing to me," said Ferris.

"Wait!" cried the judge. "About six years ago the woman was seen at her

father's home in North Carolina. I reckon Gatewood had cast her off. She didn't go back empty-handed. She had run away from her husband with a child—a girl; after a lapse of twenty years she returned to her father with a boy of two or three. There are two questions that must be answered when I find Gatewood: what became of the woman, and what became of the child; are they living or dead; did the daughter grow up and marry and have a son? When I get my answer it will be time enough to think of Gatewood's punishment!" The judge leaned forward across the table, bringing his face close to Ferris' face. "Look at me—do you know me now?"

But Ferris' expression never altered. The judge fell back a step.

"Ferris, I want the boy," he said quietly.

"What boy?"

"My grandson!"

"You are mad! What do I know of him—or you?" Ferris was gaining courage from the sound of his own voice.

"You know who he is and where he is. Your business relations with this man Ware have put you on the track of the Quintard lands in this state. You intend to use the boy to gather them in."

"You're mad!" repeated Ferris.

"Unless you bring him to me inside of twenty-four hours I'll smash you!" roared the judge. "Your name isn't Ferris, it's Gatewood; you've stolen the name of Ferris, just as you have stolen other things. What's come of Turberville's money? Damn your soul! I want my grandson! I'll pull you down and leave you stripped and bare! I'll tell the world the false friend you've been—the thief you are! I'll strip you and turn you out of these doors as naked as when you entered the world!" The judge seemed to tower above Ferris; the man had shot up out of his deep debasement. "Choose! Choose!" he thundered, his shaggy brows bent in a menacing frown.

"I know nothing about the boy," said Ferris slowly.

"By God, you lie!" stormed the judge.

"I know nothing about the boy," and Ferris took a step toward the door.

"Stay where you are!" commanded the judge. "If you attempt to leave this room to call your niggers I'll kill you on its threshold!"

But Yancy and Cavendish had that was evident, and Ferris' thin face cast itself in haggard lines. He was feeling the judge's terrible capacity, his unexpected ability to deal with a supreme situation. Even Mahaffy gazed at his friend in wonder. He had only seen him spend himself on trifles, with no further object than stepped to the door with an intention the next meal or the next drink; he had believed that as he knew him so he had always been, lax and loose of tongue and deed, a noisy tavern hero, but now he saw that he was filling what must have been the measure of his manhood.



He Tossed the Glass and Contents in Ferris' Face.

"I tell you I had no hand in carrying off the boy," said Ferris with a sardonic smile.

"I look to you to return him. Stir yourself, Gatewood, or by God, I'll hold no more a reckoning with you—" The sentence remained unfinished, for Ferris felt his overwrought nerves snap, and, giving way to a sudden blind fury, struck at the judge.

"We are too old for rough and tumble," said the judge, who had displayed astonishing agility in avoiding the blow. "Furthermore we were once gentlemen. At present I am what I am, while you are a hound and a blackguard! We'll settle this as becomes our breeding." He poured himself a second glass of liquor from Ferris' decanter. "I wonder if it is possible to insult you," and he tossed glass and contents in Ferris' face. The colonel's thin features were convulsed. The judge watched him with a scornful curling of the lips. "I am treating you better than you deserve," he taunted.

"Tomorrow morning at sun-up at Boggs' race-track!" cried Ferris. The judge bowed with splendid courtesy.

"Nothing could please me half so well," he declared. He turned to the others. "Gentlemen, this is a private matter. When I have met Colonel Ferris I shall make a public announcement of why this appeared necessary to me; until then I trust this matter will not be given publicity. May I ask your silence?" He bowed again, and abruptly passed from the room.

His three friends followed in his steps, leaving Ferris standing by the table, the ghost of a smile on his thin lips.

As if the very place were evil, the judge hurried down the drive toward the road. At the gate he paused and turned on his companions, but his features wore a look of dignity that forbade comment or question. He held out his hand to Yancy.

"Sir," he said, "if I could command the riches of the Indies, it would tax my resources to meet the fractional part of my obligations to you."

"Think of that!" said Yancy, as much overwhelmed by the judge's manner as by his words.

"His Uncle Bob shall keep his place in my grandson's life! We'll watch him grow into manhood together." The judge was visibly affected. A smile of deep content parted Mr. Yancy's lips as his muscular fingers closed about the judge's hand with crushing force.

"Whoop!" cried Cavendish, delighted at this recognition of Yancy's love for the boy, and he gleefully smote the austere Mahaffy on the shoulder. But Mahaffy was dumb in the presence of the deencies; he quite lacked an interpreter. The judge looked back at the house.

"Mine!" he muttered. "The clothes he stands in—the food he eats—mine! Mine!"

CHAPTER XXV.

The Bubble Bursts.

At about the same hour that the judge was hurling threats and insults at Colonel Ferris, three men were waiting ten miles away at the head of the bayou which served to isolate Hicks' cabin. Now no one of these three had ever heard of Judge Sloum Price; the breath of his fame had never blown, however gently, in their direction, yet they were preparing to thrust opportunity upon him. To this end they were lounging about the opening in the woods where the horses belonging to Ware and Murrell were tied.

At length the dip of oars became audible in the silence and one of the trio stole down the path, a matter of fifty yards, to a point that overlooked the bayou. He was gone but a moment.

"It's Murrell all right!" he said in an eager whisper. "Him and another fellow—the Hicks girl is rowing them." He glanced from one to the other of his companions, who seemed to take firmer hold of themselves under his eye. "It'll be all right," he protested lightly. "He's as good as ours. Wait till I give you the word." And he led the way into an adjacent thicket.

Meantime Ware and Murrell had landed and were coming along the path, the outlaw a step or two in advance of his friend. They reached the horses and were untying them when the thicket suddenly disgorged the three men; each held a cocked pistol; two of these pistols covered Murrell and the third was leveled at Ware.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Heavy.

"Speaking of the holy bonds of matrimony."

"Speak on. I am prepared to hear the worst."

"Our friend Muffkins says there are no times when they seem to him like log chains."

SNAPSHOTS AT STATE NEWS

All Pennsylvania Gleaned for Items of Interest.

REPORTS ABOUT CROPS GOOD

Farmers Busy in Every Locality—Churches Raising Funds for Many Worthy Objects—Items of Business and Pleasure that Interest.

Young Walter Elverson broke his leg in a football game at Ambridge.

Chambersburg is to have a paid fire department superintendent.

George Motter, of Duncannon, has been elected cashier of the Hanover Bank, to succeed W. A. Schlingman, resigned.

Luther Sites was brought from Toledo, Ohio, by Sheriff Walker on the charge of deserting his wife at Chambersburg.

On the eve of his trial for alleged non-support of his family, at Turtle Creek Louis Turner killed himself with a revolver.

In 29 years E. S. Flory has killed 249 pine squirrels on a piece of timberland near Altenwald, because of their habit of killing gray squirrels.

A broken gasoline connection caused the destruction of the \$3,900 automobile of Davis Hambright, of Bangor, while passing through Mt. Pleasant.

Her ring catching on the spikes of a fence, the third finger of eight-year-old Viola Brewster, of Mauch Chunk, was torn off at the joint in her sister's efforts to release her.

Clarence Berkebile, aged 14, while playing on the street at Johnstown, walked in front of a heavy automobile truck driven by a man named Schultz and was instantly killed.

By the use of nearly 300,000 units of anti-tetanus serum, the life of Mary Alice Chadmond, 19 years old, who a month ago ran a splinter into her hand, was saved, at Lancaster.

Early in the morning a resident in the neighborhood of the old Empire breaker at Wilkes-Barre shot a large groundhog in his garden as it was destroying his cabbage crop.

For sending threatening letters to his employer, whose barn was later mysteriously burned, Jacob Miller, found guilty in Court at Allentown, was sentenced to three years in jail and a \$500 fine.

Kicked on the jaw by a vicious horse while cleaning his stall, at Nazareth, Charles Werner's maxillary was broken by the blow and his skull fractured from impact with the stable wall.

Altoona was chartered as a city in February, 1868, and people there are talking of celebrating the semi-centennial six years hence. Altoona was selected in 1849 as the site for the Pennsylvania Railroad town. In 1852 the first house was built there by John Westley, who died 12 years ago. The settlement was named from the Cherokee word "Allatoona," meaning high lands of great wealth. In 1854 the place was chartered as a borough and G. W. Patton, a Whig, was elected the first Burgess.

D. W. Wyant, a farmer living near Covode, five miles south of Punxsutawney, has sold \$225 worth of Northern Spy apples this fall that were the product of eight trees. These eight trees would not occupy over a quarter of an acre. Mr. Wyant has a new orchard of 600 trees coming on, and in a few years they will produce an income that will make him independent. He says that he paid little attention to his apple trees this year, and that the labor bestowed on an acre of apple trees is less than would be given to the cultivation of an acre of any other crop.

P. N. Earl, proprietor of a manufactory at East Columbia, is the owner of a cocker spaniel that he prized very highly until the dog got bad and made short work of some of Mr. Earl's cash. The pay envelopes had been filled, and while the clerk was absent from the office the dog chewed open and scattered the contents of several envelopes upon the floor. Considerable of the paper money was chewed into bits. The clerk was able to account for all of the money except a \$10 bill and a \$2 bill that were in one envelope. Fragments of the envelope were found, but as no part of the bills were found it is presumed the dog ate them.

John Shissler, a Lancaster painter, fell 30 feet from a ladder and was dead when associates reached him.

Having dislocated his shoulder, Jacob Peden shot himself beside his baby daughter, at Monessen, and died.

For pointing a gun at his wife and threatening to shoot her, Otto Schrank was sentenced to a year in jail at Allentown, but by direction of the court a petition was drawn to put him on probation, so he could work and support his family.

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