



THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

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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 tells how he adopted the boy, Nathaniel Ferris, who he thought was his own son. Yancy keeps 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 overrules Blount, gives him a thrashing and secures the boy. Yancy appears before Squire Balaam, 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. Carrington 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. In playing for big stakes, Yancy awakes from long dreamless sleep on board the raft. Judge Price makes startling discoveries in looking up land titles. Charles 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 uprising of negroes. Judge Price, with Hannibal, visits Betty, and she keeps the boy as a companion. In a stroll Betty takes with Hannibal they meet Bess, Hicks' daughter of the overseer, who warns Betty of danger and counsels her to leave Belle Plain at once. Carrington, Betty and Hannibal are made prisoners. The pair are taken to Hicks' cabin, in an almost inaccessible spot, and there Murrell visits Betty and reveals his part in the plot and his object. Betty spurns his proffered love and the interview is ended by the arrival of Ware, terrified at possible outcome of the crime. 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 Pentress, where he meets Yancy and Cavendish. Becoming enraged, Price dashes a glass of whiskey into the colonel's face and a duel is arranged. Murrell is arrested for negro stealing and his bubble bursts.

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

"You swear you'll do your part?" he said thickly. He took his purse from his pocket and counted out the amount due Hicks. He named the total, and paused irresolutely.

"Don't you want the fire lighted?" asked Hicks. He was familiar with his employer's vacillating moods.

"Yes," answered Ware, his lips quivering; and slowly, with shaking fingers, he added to the pile of bills in Hicks' hand.

"Well, take care of yourself," said Hicks, when the count was complete. He thrust the roll of bills into his pocket and moved to the door.

Alone again, the planter collapsed into his chair, breathing heavily, but his terrors swept over him and left him with a savage sense of triumph. This passed; he sprang up, intending to recall Hicks and unmake his bargain. What had he been thinking of—safety lay only in flight! Before he reached the door his greed was in the ascendant. He dropped down on the edge of his bed, his eyes fixed on the window. The sun sank lower. From where he sat he saw it through the upper half of the sash, blood-red and livid in a mist of fleecy clouds.

It was in the tops of the old oaks now, which sent their shadows into his room. Again maddened by his terrors, he started and backed toward the door; but again his greed, the one dominating influence of his life, vanquished him.

He watched the sun sink. He watched the red splendor fade over the river; he saw the first stars appear. He told himself that Hicks would soon be gone—if the fire was not to be lighted he must act at once! He stole to the window. It was dusk now, yet he could distinguish the distant wooded boundaries of the great fields framed by the darkening sky. Then in the silence he heard the thud of hoofs.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Judge Names His Second.

"Price—" began Mahaffy. They were back in Raleigh in the room the judge called his office, and this was Mahaffy's first opportunity to ease his mind on the subject of the duel, as they had only just parted from Yancy and Cavendish, who had stopped at one of the stores to make certain purchases for the raft.

"Not a word, Solomon—it had to come. I am going to kill him. I shall feel better then."

"What if he kills you?" demanded Mahaffy harshly. The judge shrugged his shoulders.

"That is as it may be."

"Have you forgotten your grandson?" Mahaffy's voice was still harsh and rasping.

"I regard my meeting with Pentress as nothing less than a sacred duty to him."



"It Will Be Quite Informal, the Code Is Scarcely Applicable."

grandson shall. He shall wear velvet and a lace collar and ride his pony yet, by God, as a gentleman's grandson should!"

"It sounds well, Price, but where's the money coming from to push a lawsuit?"

The judge waved this aside.

"The means will be found, Solomon. Our horizon is lifting—I can see it lift! Don't drag me back from the portal of hope! We'll drink the stuff that comes across the water; that from me and what would I be? Why, the very fate I have been fighting off with tooth and nail would overwhelm me. I'd sink into unimportance—my unparalleled misfortunes would degrade me to a level with the commonest! No, sir, I've never been without hope, and though I've fallen I've always got up. What Pentress has based on money he stole from me. By God, the days of his profit-taking are at an end! I am going to strip him. And even if I still seeing his ghastly face, and he had come upon him with startling suddenness. He had chanced to look back over his shoulder and when he faced about there had been the planter within a hundred yards of him.

Presently Carrington's glance ceased to follow the windings of the path. He stared down at the gray dust and saw the trail left by Hines and his "You may need it at Belle Plain. Good by, and God bless you!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

Bess Leads to Betty.

Just where he had parted from Ware, Carrington sat his horse, his brows knit and his eyes turned in the direction of the path. He was on his way to a plantation below Hiram, the owner of which had recently imported a pack of bloodhounds; but this unexpected encounter with Ware had affected him strangely. He still heard party. For a moment he hesitated;

If the dogs were to be used with any hope of success he had no time to spare, and this was the merest suspicion, illogical conjecture, based on nothing beyond his distrust of Ware. In the end he sprang from the saddle, and leading his horse into the woods, tied it to a sapling.

A hurried investigation told him that five men had ridden in and out of that path. Of the five, all coming from the south, four had turned south again, but the fifth man—Ware, in other words—had gone north. He weighed the possible significance of these facts.

"I am only wasting time!" he confessed reluctantly, and was on the point of turning away, when, on the very edge of the road and just where the dust yielded to the hard clay of the path, his glance lighted on the print of a small and daintily shod foot. The throbbing of his heart quickened curiously.

"Betty!" The word leaped from his lips.

That small foot had left but the one impress. There were other signs, however, that claimed his attention; namely, the boot-prints of Slosson and his men; and he made the inevitable discovery that these tracks were all confined to the one spot. They began suddenly and as suddenly ceased, yet there was no mystery about these; he had the marks of the wheels to help him to a sure conclusion. A carriage had turned just here, several men had alighted; they had with them a child, or a woman. Either they had re-entered the carriage and driven back as they had come, or they had gone toward the river. He felt the soul within him turn sick.

He stole along the path; the terror of the river was ever in his thoughts, and the specter of his fear seemed to flit before him and lure him on. Presently he caught his first glimpse of the bayou and his legs shook under him; but the path wound deeper still into what appeared to be an untouched solitude, wound on between the crowding tree forms, a little back from the shore, with an intervening tangle of vines and bushes. He scanned this closely as he hurried forward, scarcely conscious that he was searching for some trampled space at the water's edge; but the verdant wall preserved its unbroken continuity, and twenty minutes later he came within sight of Hicks' clearing and the keel boat, where it rested against the bank.

A little farther on he found the spot where Slosson had launched the skiff the night before. The keel of his boat had cut deep into the slippery clay; more than this, the impress of the small shoe was repeated here, and just beside it was the print of a child's bare foot.

He no longer doubted that Betty and Hannibal had been taken across the bayou to the cabin, and he ran back up the path the distance of a mile and plunged into the woods on his right, his purpose being to pass around the head of the expanse of sluggish water to a point from which he could later approach the cabin.

But the cabin proved to be better defended than he had foreseen; and as he advanced, the difficulties of the task he had set himself became almost insurmountable; yet sustained as he was by his imperative need, he tore his way through the labyrinth of trailing vines, or floundered across acre-wide patches of green slime and black mud, which at each step threatened to engulf him in their treacherous depths, until at the end of an hour he gained the southern side of the clearing and a firmer footing within the shelter of the woods.

Here he paused and took stock of his surroundings. The two or three buildings Mr. Hicks had erected stood midway of the clearing and were very modest improvements adapted to their owner's somewhat flippant pursuit of agriculture. While Carrington was still staring about him, the cabin door swung open and a woman stepped forth. It was the girl Bess. She went to a corner of the building and called loudly:

"Jos! Oh, Jos!"

Carrington glanced in the direction of the keel boat and an instant later saw Slosson clamber over its side. The tavern-keeper crossed to the cabin, where he was met by Bess, who placed in his hands what seemed to be a wooden bowl. With this he slouched off to one of the outbuildings, which he entered. Ten or fifteen minutes slipped by, then he came from the shed and after securing the door, returned to the cabin. He was again met by Bess, who relieved him of the bowl; they exchanged a few words and Slosson walked away and afterward disappeared over the side of the keel boat.

This much was clear to the Kentuckian: food had been taken to some one in the shed—to Betty and the boy!—more likely to George.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HAWK KNOCKS FARMER DOWN

Mistakes Hat for Pheasant and Swoops on Berrypicker

BLOW THAT LAID HIM FLAT

Bird Flew to Tree Fifty Yards Away and Dropped Hat—Spread of Wings Was Five Feet—Left Marks of Its Talons.

Allentown.—To be stretched out by a hawk, like a fighter who has received a knock-down blow, was the unusual experience of Nicholas Dotter, of Saylorsville. He was picking wintergreen berries for his oil distillery, when he received a blow that laid him flat. The blow was accompanied by a mighty swoop, and he knew it came from above. As he looked up he saw a monster hawk, with a spread of wings of fully five feet, sailing away with his hat. After flying about 500 yards the bird dropped the hat and later alighted on a dead tree nearby. Dotter believes that the hawk mistook his hat, which is brown, for a pheasant, as he was working through the brush, picking the berries. Jagged rips made by the bird's talons confirm his story.

Jests as Surgeons Carve.

Beaver Falls.—While surgeons carved and sewed at his feet during an operation at the Providence Hospital, J. T. Mecklin, pure ood inspector of Ellwood City, lay on the table and joked with those around him. For some time Mecklin had been afflicted with a disease of the veins in his feet and the ailment had become so serious that an operation was decided on. When the surgeons were ready to begin the operation Mecklin refused to take an anesthetic, and declared that they might proceed with their work, as he was not greatly concerned over the pain. He never whimpered during the operation, although the surgeons say it was of a very painful nature.

Wily Chicken Thief Caught.

York.—One of the wisest old chicken thieves in York county will hereafter serve as the emblem of the York Lodge of Owls. The thief thus to be honored is an enormous horned owl, captured alive by George Newcomer, of Hellam township, who thereby solved the mystery of the disappearance of many a plump fowl. Newcomer brought his prize to York and sold it to the lodgemen. The finding of a slain guinea fowl, partly devoured, put the man on the right track. He set three muskrat traps, baiting each with a portion of the slain fowl, and next morning the savage old owl, caught by a single claw, was in one of them.

Worry Drives Her to Noose.

Coatesville.—Worrying over the death of her mother, which news was kept from her until two weeks after the funeral, owing to her ill-health, Mrs. Mary Boyd, wife of Hayes Boyd, a farmer of Highland township, committed suicide by hanging herself in the barn, while the family was absent. She was found by Mr. Boyd when he returned from Parkersburg. Deputy Coroner W. H. Wilson, of Parkersburg, held an inquest and returned a verdict of suicide. Mrs. Boyd's mother died two months ago, and ever since Mrs. Boyd learned that her mother was dead and buried she has worried.

Death in Burning Culin.

Wilkes-Barre.—While men were working on a burning culm bank at the Pine Ridge colliery of the Delaware & Hudson Company at Parsons, near here, a portion of the bank caved in, suffocating Stephen Zevanta, aged 40, a laborer. James Matthews, another laborer, was dug out of the debris, but so badly burned that he died at the hospital. Andrew Skolanda, laborer, was also probably fatally injured.

Children Flirt with Death.

Lewistown Junction.—John Loflin, nine years old, and Edna Bowers, eight years old, flirted with death when they jumped on the tongue of a steam threshing machine hauled by a traction engine to steal a ride. Both were jolted from their perch and the heavy machinery passed over their bodies inflicting only a few bruises. The soft nature of the road, a sand bar, saved them from instant death.

Men Win in Two Strikes.

Conshohocken.—The strike of the 1,900 employees of the Alan Wood Iron & Steel Company, and of the J. Wood & Brothers Company, was broken when the firms agreed to the demand of the men for 10 per cent. increase in wages. The new scale will affect every employee of the two plants.

Rabbit Shoots Gunning Youth.

Easton.—Literally shot by what he intended for the cook pot, S. A. Newman, 17-year-old son of W. S. Newman, of Hackettstown, N. J., is in Easton Hospital, nearly dead from loss of blood. Newman had laid a number of traps along the canal near Hackettstown and in the first one he examined he found a rabbit. Placing his gun on the ground, he liberated the captive, which gave a jump and landed on the triggers of the weapon, discharging both barrels. The contents entered Newman's left thigh.

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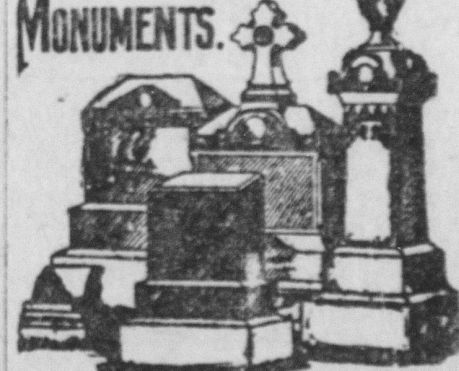
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