THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

By VAUGHAN KESTER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY D. MELVILE

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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 Binder, 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 kidnaped by Dave Blount. Captain Murrell's agent. Yancy overtakes Blount, gives him a thrashing and secures the boy. Yancy appears before Squire Balsam, 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 rifle 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 dreamless sleep on board the raft. Judge Price makes startling discoveries in looking up land titles. Charley Norten, 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. Betty, terrified, acts on Bess' advice, and on their way their carriage it stopped by Slosson, the tavern keeper, and a confederate, and 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.
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CHAPTER XX (Continued).

"Let me go!" she panted. He laughed his cool laugh of triumph.

"Let you go—ask me anything but that, Betty! Have you no reward for patience such as mine? A whole summer has passed since I saw you first—"

There was the noisy shuffling of feet on the stairs, and releasing Betty, Murrell swung about on his heel and faced the door. It was pushed open an inch at a time by a not too confident hand and Mr. Slosson thus guardedly presented himself to the eye of his chief, whom he beckoned from the room.

"Well?" said Murrell, when they stood together on the landing.

"Just come across to the keel boat!" and Slosson led the way down stairs and from the house.

"Damn you, Joe, you might have waited!" observed the outlaw. Slosson gave him a hardened grin. They crossed the clearing and boarded the keel boat which rested against the bank. As they did so the cabin in the stern gave up a shattered presence in the shape of Tom Ware. Murrell started violently. "I thought you were hanging out in Memphis, Tom?" he said, and his brow darkened, as, sinister and forbidding, he stepped closer to the planter. Ware did not answer at once, but looked at Murrell out of heavy bloodshot eyes, his face pinched and ghastly. At last he said, speaking with visible effort.

"I stayed in Memphis until five o'clock this morning."

"Damn your early hours!" roared Murrell. "What are you doing here? I suppose you've been showing that dead face of yours about the neighborhood—why didn't you stay at Belle Plain, since you couldn't keep away?"

"I haven't been near Belle Plain; I came here instead. How am I going to meet people and answer questions?" His teeth were chattering. "Is it known she's missing?" he added.

"Hicks raised the alarm the first thing this morning, according to the instructions I'd given him."

"Yes?" gasped Ware. He was dripping from every pore and the sickly color came and went on his unshaven cheeks. Murrell dropped a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"You haven't been at Belle Plain, you say, but has any one seen you on the road this morning?"

"No one, John," cried Ware, panting between each word. There was a moment's pause and Ware spoke again. "What are they doing at Belle Plain?" he demanded in a whisper. Murrell's lips curled.

"I understand there is talk of suicide," he said.

"Good!" cried Ware.

"They are dragging the bayou down below the house. It looks as though you were going to reap the rewards of the excellent management you have given her estate. They have been trying to find you in Memphis, so the sooner you show yourself the better," he concluded significantly.

"You are sure you have her safe, John, no chance of discovery? For God's sake get her away from here as soon as you can; it's an awful risk you run!"

"She'll be sent down river tonight," said Murrell.

"Captain," began Slosson, who up to this had taken no part in the conversation, "when are you going to cross to t'other side of the bayou?"

"Soon," replied Murrell. Slosson laughed.

"I didn't know but you'd clean forgot the Clan's business. I want to ask another question—but first I want to say that no one thinks higher or more frequent of the ladies than just me; I'm genuinely fond of 'em, and I've never lifted my hand ag'in 'em except in kindness." Mr. Slosson looked at Ware with an exceedingly virtuous expression of countenance. He continued: "Yo' orders are that we're to slip out of this a little afore midnight, but suppose there's a hitch—here's the lady knowing what she knows and here's the boy knowing what he knows."

"There can be no hitch," rasped out Murrell arrogantly.

"I never knew a speculation that couldn't go wrong; and by rights we should have got away last night."

"Well, whose fault is it you didn't?" demanded Murrell.

"In a manner it were mine, but the ark got on a sandbank as we were fetching it in and it took us the whole damn night to get clear."

"Well?" prompted Murrell, with a sullen frown.

"Suppose they get shut of that notion of theirs that the lady's done drowned herself; suppose they take to watching the river? Or suppose the whole damn bottom drops out of this deal? What then? The lady, good looking as she is, knows enough to make west Tennessee mighty onhealthy for some of us. I say, suppose it's a flash in the pan and you have to crowd the distance in between you and this part of the world, you can't tell me you'll have any use for her then." Slosson paused impressively. "And here's Mr. Ware feeling bad, feeling like hell," he resumed. "Him and me don't want to be left in no trap with you gone God only knows where."

"I'll send a man to take charge of the keel boat. I can't risk any more of your bungling, Joe."

"That's all right, but you don't answer my question," persisted Slosson, with admirable tenacity of purpose.

"What is your question, Joe?"

"A lot can happen between this and midnight—"

"If things go wrong with us there'll be a blaze at the head of the bayou; Does that satisfy you?"

"And what then?"

Murrell hesitated.

"What about the girl?" insisted Slosson, dragging him back to the point at issue between them. "As a man I wouldn't lift my hand ag'in no good looking woman except, like I said, in kindness; but she can't be turned loose; she knows too much. What's the word, Captain—you say it!" he urged. He made a gesture of appeal to Ware.

"Look for the light; better still, look for the man I'll send." And with this Murrell would have turned away, but Slosson detained him.

"Who'll he be?"

"Some fellow who knows the river."

"And if it's the light?" asked the tavern-keeper in a hoarse undertone. Again he looked toward Ware, who, dry-lipped and ashen, was regarding him steadfastly. Glance met glance, for a brief instant they looked into each other's eyes and then the hand Slosson had rested on Murrell's shoulder dropped at his side.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Judge Meets the Situation.

The judge's and Mr. Mahaffy's celebration of the former's rehabilitated credit had occupied the shank of the evening, the small hours of the night, and that part of the succeeding day which the southwest described as soon in the morning; and as the stone jug, in which were garnered the spoils of the highly confidential but entirely misleading conversation which the judge had held with Mr. Pegloe after his return from Belle Plain, lost in weight, it might have been observed that he and Mr. Mahaffy seemed to gain in that nice sense of equity which should form the basis of all human relations. The judge watched Mr. Mahaffy, and Mr. Mahaffy watched the judge, each trustfully placing the regulation of his private conduct in the hands of his friend, as the one most likely to be affected by the rectitude of his acts.

Probably so extensive a consumption of Mr. Pegloe's corn whisky had never been accomplished with greater highmindedness. They honorably split the last glass.

The judge sighed deeply. He took up the jug and inverted it. A stray drop or so fell languidly into his glass.

"Try squeezing it, Price," said Mahaffy.

The judge shook the jug, it gave forth an empty sound, and he sighed again; he attempted to peer into it, closing one watery eye as he tilted it toward the light.

"I wonder no Yankee has ever thought to invent a jug with a glass bottom," he observed.

"What for?" asked Mahaffy.

"You astonish me, Solomon," exclaimed the judge. "Coming as you do from that section which invented the wooden nutmeg, and an eight-day clock that has been known to run as much as four or five hours at a stretch. I am aware the Yankees are an ingenious people; I wonder none of 'em ever thought of a jug with a glass bottom, so that when a body holds it up to the light he can see at a glance whether it is empty or not. Do you reckon Pegloe has sufficient confidence to fill the jug again for us?"

But Mahaffy's expression indicated no great confidence in Mr. Pegloe's confidence.

"Credit," began the judge, "is proverbially shy; still it may sometimes be increased, like the muscles of the body and the mental faculties, by judicious use. I've always regarded Pegloe's as a cheap mind. I hope I have done him an injustice." He put on his hat, and tucking the jug under his arm went from the house.

Ten or fifteen minutes elapsed. Mahaffy considered this a good sign; it didn't take long to say no, he reflected. Another ten or fifteen elapsed. Mahaffy lost heart. Then there came a hasty step beyond the door, it was thrown violently open, and the judge precipitated himself into the room. A glance showed Mahaffy that he was laboring under intense excitement.

"Solomon, I bring shocking news. God knows what the next few hours may reveal!" cried the judge, mopping his brow. "Miss Malroy has disappeared from Belle Plain, and Hannibal has gone with her!"

"Where have they gone?" asked Mahaffy, and his long jaw dropped.

"Would to God I had an answer ready for that question, Solomon!" answered the judge, with a melancholy shake of the head. He gazed down on his friend with an air of large tolerance. "I am going to Belle Plain, but you are too drunk. Sleep it off, Solomon, and join me when your brain is clear and your legs steady."

"Try Squeezing It, Price," Said Mahaffy.

Mahaffy jerked out an oath, and lifting himself off his chair, stood erect. He snatched up his hat.

"Stuff your pistols into your pockets, and come on, Price!" he said, and stalked toward the door.

He flitted up the street, and the judge puffed and panted in his wake. They gained the edge of the village without speech.

"There is mystery and rascality here!" said the judge.

"What do you know, Price, and where did you hear this?" Mahaffy shot the question back over his shoulder.

"At Pegloe's; the Belle Plain overseer had just fetched the news into town."

Again they were silent, all their energies being absorbed by the physical exertion they were making. The road danced before their burning eyes, it seemed to be uncoiling itself serpent-wise with hideous undulations. Mr. Mahaffy was conscious that the judge, of whom he caught a blurred vision now at his right side, now at his left, was laboring painfully in the heat and dust, the breath whistling from between his parched lips.

"You're just ripe for apoplexy, Price!" he snarled, moderating his pace.

"Go on," said the judge, with stolid resolution.

Two miles out of the village they came to a roadside spring; here they paused for an instant. Mahaffy scooped up handfuls of the clear water and sucked it greedily. The judge dropped on his stomach and buried his face in the tiny pool, gulping up great thirsty swallows.

"If anything happens to the child, the man responsible for it would better never been born—I'll pursue him with undiminished energy from this moment forth!" he panted.

"What could happen to him, Price?" asked Mahaffy.

"God knows, poor little lad!"

"Will you shut up!" cried Mahaffy savagely.

"Solomon!"

"Why do you go building on that idea? Why should any one harm him—what earthly purpose—"

"I tell you, Solomon, we are the pivotal point in a vast circle of crime. This is a blow at me—this is revenge, sir, neither more nor less! They have struck at me through the boy, it is as plain as day."

"What did the overseer say?"

"Just that they found Miss Malroy gone from Belle Plain this morning, and the boy with her."

"This is like you, Price! How do you know they haven't spent the night at some neighbor's?"

"The nearest neighbor is five or six miles distant. Miss Malroy and Hannibal were seen along about dusk in the grounds at Belle Plain; do you mean to tell me you consider it likely that they set out on foot at that hour, and without a word to any one, to make a visit?" inquired the judge; but Mahaffy did not contend for this point.

"What are you going to do first, Price?"

"Have a look over the grounds, and talk with the slaves."

"Where's the brother—wasn't he at Belle Plain last night?"

"It seems he went to Memphis yesterday."

They plodded forward in silence; now and again they were passed by some man on horseback whose destination was the same as their own, and then at last they caught sight of Belle Plain in its grove of trees.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A FIGHTING DOCTOR

How One Young Physician Literally Fought His Way Into Fame and Practice.

BY JOHN PHILIP ORTH.

When a medical student has received his diploma and is turned adrift to succeed or fail it is the crisis of his life. Not one in ten can figure out how he is going to support himself until he can get a foothold. When he has selected his town and his office and his home he must wait for patients, and weeks and months may go by before his prescriptions begin to be handed in to the drug store.

When Dr. Charles Chisholm made his advent at Lansing he found seven M. D.'s for a population of 3,500. That was 500 each. In the course of a year, as doctors figure, ten people out of every 500 will need the service of a physician. That is the average, outside of epidemics. Taking the doctors' figures again, the charge to the ten patients will not average over $15 each. That means an income of $150 per year, and an outgo of $600. Out of seven doctors in a town with the population given, two will make a fair income. The other five will simply hang on and wish they had learned the carpenter's trade.

Doctor Chisholm had this all figured out, and yet he decided to take chances and hope for luck. Another man might have been kept waiting for months. He was taking his first drive into the country to get the lay of the land, when luck came galloping up. Miss Nellie Mayfield, daughter of the owner of the big shoe factory, was taking a walk in the suburbs with her little dog at her heels when she suddenly found herself face to face with an evil-faced vagabond. It was her screams as he laid hands on her purse that reached the young doctor's ear from around a bend in the road and caused him to apply the whip to his somewhat lethargic horse.

The shindy did not last more than two minutes. The doctor leaped from his buggy and knocked the fellow down, but that wasn't the finish. When the vagabond scrambled up he drew a knife and made a slash that scratched the doctors' shoulder. Down he went again, and this time he got the full dose. His knife was left behind, and he had seven different limps as he disappeared into the bushes. When the victor turned to the girl she was a quarter of a mile down the road and still running. Young Chisholm drove home without a word to anyone of the affair, but within a day he was being congratulated.

Among those who called was Mr. Mayfield. He was a man of few words.

"They say he had a knife and used it," he said as he held out his hand.

"It was only a scratch," was the reply.

"Have you set up here as a doctor?"

"Yes."

"Think you can make a go of it?"

"I shall try hard."

"Good!"

There were three bullies in Lansing. Jake Wolf, the driver of a brewery wagon, was a bully because he loved to fight. A week after the doctor's adventure, and right in front of his office, Jake's wagon collided with the vehicle of Mr. Davis, the banker, and tore off a wheel. It was Jake's bad driving that caused the accident, but he jumped down for a scrap.

"Quit that!" commanded the doctor as he stood in his door.

"If you want to mix in come along!"

Doctor Chisholm threw off his coat and stepped out. His was a strong prescription. In five minutes he had the bully licked for the first time in his life.

"You are the new doctor?" queried the banker as they shook hands.

"Yes."

"How are you making out?"

"I've licked two men so far!"

"Then you'll get along. Any time you want a hundred dollars on your note come and see me."

It went all over town that the new doctor had given Jake Wolf his dose, and there were more compliments. Mr. Mayfield stepped within the door of the office to nod and say:

"Keep right on! You are doing well!"

"Thanks."

Jack Brown, the stone mason, had the habit of going on a spree every two weeks. When about half-drunk he would start in to make Rome howl. It came his day, and as he passed the doctor's office he entered to wreck things. The only thing wrecked was the stone mason. He got such a thumping that the Temperance union had to let him sign the pledge in three places before he was satisfied. A score of men dropped in to shake hands with Doctor Chisholm, and Mr Mayfield met him at the post office and linked arms with him and said:

"Come along to dinner with me. I like a fighter."

"But I am no man to pick a quarrel," was the reply.

"No? You just happen to be on the spot when the row starts. Well, come along and hear what Miss Nellie has to say about it. I think most girls like a strong-armed man."

There were introductions and a pleasant evening, and while Doctor Chisholm was enjoying himself he was being discussed by two doctors seated in the office of one of them.

"He must surely starve out," remarked one.

"He can make no headway here," was the reply.

"But is he a prize fighter or a doctor?"

"I don't know."

"This community won't stand for his tactics."

"Bound to go under."

"I have cut him dead thus far."

"We can't recognize him."

There was one more bully, and he was a bad tempered man—Jim Eccles. He was bad-tempered drunk or sober. When he heard how Doctor Chisholm had served the others he growled:

"Come to run the town has he? Well you wait a bit!"

"What are you going to do?" was asked.

"Bounce him out of Lansing!"

Again the doctor sat in his office reading a medical work when he had a caller. It was Jim Eccles. He was sober and he had a job before him.

"Skate!" he said as he pointed to the street.

"Why?" was quietly asked.

"Because I tell you to!"

"You are Jim Eccles, the bad man?"

"Bad all the way through, and I don't generally hold my temper as long as this."

"Your blood is out of order Mr. Eccles, and I'll give you a prescription for it!"

The scrap took place out of doors, and the audience said it was just the neatest little affair the town of Lansing had ever been treated to. When it was over the doctor had a black eye and Mr. Jim Eccles said he was going to California to take on an earthquake or some other easy mark. Three of the doctors in the town witnessed the affair, and as they walked away they were agreed that it was the finish of the new comer. Doctor Chisholm was bathing his eye when Mr Mayfield entered the office to say:

"So you got around to Eccles, eh? Come to dinner with me."

"Can't. See this black eye?"

"All the better. Miss Nellie has always wanted to see one close at hand. No cause for embarrassment—not in the least."

And the doctor went, and things were made very nice for him. As he left the house it was Miss Nellie who said:

"Father thinks you will succeed."

"Oh, I've got to," he laughed.

At the door of his office a woman waited to ask:

"Are you the fighting doctor?"

"Well, I've had a few scraps."

"Then come and see my sick child."

The next morning it was a woman with an ailing husband, and there were six calls before night. In each and every case the caller made sure that he or she was addressing the fighting doctor.

And next day what happened but that the banker's wife got a chicken bone in her throat, and Miss Nellie Mayfield had a sudden pain in her side and wanted medical attendance.

"Go ahead and treat us all for anything you wish!" laughed Mr. Mayfield; and the fighting doctor knew that his practice was an assured thing.

"Did you ever!" exclaimed the doctors to each other.

They never did. When they woke up they found a new doctor at the head of the procession and the town predicting a son-in-law for Mr. Mayfield. For once the gossips hit it right. It was the fighting doctor that left his many patients long enough one day to get married and it was Mrs. Nellie Chisholm who said:

"Never mind the bridal tour until we are worth a million dollars and can hire special trains."

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Appreciated, but Costly Honor.

On one occasion, when a public reception was given to Mr. Gladstone, a particularly obsequious old gentleman was introduced to him and forthwith commenced flattering him to such an extent that the late premier grew weary of him, so, bidding the man good day, he settled down heavily into the nearest chair. The bore, instead of passing on, lingered near and seemed to have something still in his mind, though he looked blissful. Mr. Gladstone observed this, and said, not sweetly, "May I ask you, sir, if you want anything more of me?"

"Oh—oh, no," said the man, smirking; "only perhaps I may be permitted to remark that I am proud to say that hat is having the inestimable honor to occupy the same chair with W. E. Gladstone."—Weekly Telegraph.

Womanly Reason.

The families of two neighboring flats were playing 10-cent limit poker together. After the busting of a pot the opener drew one card and the mistress of the flat where the game was played also drew one. She held to start with the deuce, trey, four and five of diamonds, and acquired the six of the same suit.

The opener bet a dime and the woman merely called. When the cards were spread her husband went up in the air.

"Why didn't you raise with that hand?" he exclaimed; "didn't you know it was worth it?"

"Yes," answered the wife, "but I didn't want to break a quarter."

Bold Things.

A trolley car in Ramsey, N. J., killed a deer just as the other trolley car did out west, as you read in this column a little while ago. The deer about Ramsey are becoming bold and brazen. The town is only twenty-five miles from New York city, but nevertheless the wild animals are not awed by the approach of civilization. The Ramsey people say that two Saturdays ago five deer walked down Main street in the middle of the day, as interested in proceedings as country people in a big city. It is said that they even went so far as to eat the oats that had been given to horses tied at the side of the street.