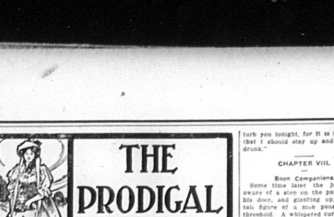

THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

By VAUGHAN KESTER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY D. MCCOLL

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SYNOPSIS.

The scene at the opening of the story is laid in the library of one of Louisville's aristocratic families, the Marshalls, of long ago. The place is by no means the finest and that of the owners, the Judge and Mrs. Marshall, is overshadowed by Jonathan Crenshaw, a business man, a stranger known as Bladen, and Bob Marshall, the son of the house. Bob and Hannah, a mysterious child of the old masters family, makes his appearance. Bob and Hannah are in love with each other and Bob has promised to marry her. Quintanna does not knowledge of the affair. Hannah is kept from Bob by Mrs. Morrell, a friend of the Quintanna family, who has designs upon the fortune. Hannah at length will leave that she is kidnaped by Dave Bonner, Cap. Bonner, a river pirate, and Mrs. Morrell. Bonner, acting on a threatening message by her. Nancy appears before Bonner and Mrs. Morrell and tells them that she planned. Bonner, however, is not the Preston, has an encounter with Cap. Bonner and Mrs. Morrell, and Hannah is rescued by Bonner. Hannah is thereby sent out for her Tennessee home and Bonner, Mrs. Morrell and Nancy are arrested. Hannah returns with Morrell and Judge Preston Price. The Judge is glad to see her, the grandson of an old friend.

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

"Boy, don't be afraid. Look to me as a friend," urged the Judge.

"I reckon I'll be glad to stop," answered Hannibal.

"Both confidence to inspiring. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hannibal.

"What do you say to cold fish?" the Judge searched his lips to impart a relish to the idea. "I dare say we can find you some corn bread into the bargain." He began to enumerate the delicties he had enumerated. "There are salted to be cheated him impressively, while benignity shone from every feature of his face. A moment since you allowed me to think you were solvent to the extent of fifty cents—" Hannibal looked puzzled and wonder if you could be induced to make a temporary loan of that fifty cents? The sum invested in reality such a ridiculous trifle I don't need to point out to you the absolute necessity certainty of my returning it at an early date."

It was not the loss of his money that Hannibal most feared, and the coin passed from his possession into his host's custody.

"Thank you, my boy!" I must step down to the tavern—when I return, please God, we shall know more of each other." While he was still speaking, he had produced a jug from behind the quilt that screened his bed, and now took himself off into the night.

Left alone, Hannibal gravely seated himself at the table. What the Judge's butler lacked in variety it more than made up in quantity, and the boy was grateful for this fact. Presently he heard the Judge's heavy, shuffling step as he came up the path from the road, and a moment later the green bulk of body filled the door way. Breathing hard and perspiring, the Judge entered the shanty, but his manner was quite silent until he had established himself in his chair beside the table, with the jug and a crushed glass at his elbow. Then, blind and nothing, he turned toward his guest.

My tenderest regards, Hannibal!" and he nodded over the rim of the crushed glass his abashed hand had emitted to his lips. Twice the glass was filled and emptied, and then again, his voice, watery eyes rested meditatively on the child. "Have you a father?" he asked suddenly. Hannibal shook his head. "A mother?" Hannibal shook off them done died years and years ago," answered the boy. "I can't tell you how long back it was, but I reckon I don't know how either it. I kind have been a small child."

"He a small child!" cried the Judge, bristling. He rolled his head on one side and outward stamped Wayne Hunting with a glance of contemptuous incredulity. "Is Gods made do you call yourself now?"

"I don't know," said Hannibal, with dignity.

"You don't believe it, respondent you, Where did you come from?"

"From across the Mississippi River," answered Hannibal, pointing to west horizon.

"You're never always to say that!" and what of factory affection ed to take of factory affection ed to take of factory affection

"His Grandson Is Back of That Car Iain, Now—Asleep in My Bed."

quilt. You'll find a box there You can sip the gin under the shock tick with it—which helps astonishing Mr. What would the world say if it could know that Judge Sloomin Price called his boy to bed with a jest?"

Hannibal retired behind the quilt. "Do you find it comfortable?" the judge asked, when the rustling of the shock this informed him that the child had laid down.

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

"Have you said your prayers?" inquired the Judge.

"No, sir," said Hannibal.

"Well, say them now. Religion is becoming the very worst as it is respectable in the aged. I'll not disturb you tonight, for it is God's will that I should stay up and get very drunk."

CHAPTER VIII.

Soon Companions.

Some time later the Judge was aware of a stir on the path beyond his door, and gladdling up, saw the tall figure of a young person on the threshold. A whispered curse slipped from between his lips. It stood as said:

"Is that you, Mr. Marshall?" He got no reply, but the tall figure, propelled by very long legs, stalked into the shanty and a pair of very familiar knees eyes deeply set under a high, bald head were fastened intently upon him.

"I take it I'm intruding," the newcomer said dryly.

"Why should you think that, Nolo-mon Marshall?" When he got down closed on you?" the judge asked, but there was a guilty despising of the flush on his face. Mr. Marshall glanced at the jug at the half-emptied glass, lastly at the judge himself.

"You seem to be raising first-rate hell all by yourself."

"Oh, be reasonable, Solomon. You'd be down to the steamboat landing," said the judge plaintively. Up way of answer, Marshall sent him a contemptuous glance. "Take a chair and, Solomon, and take a drink," he added. "When did I ever sneak a jug into my shanty?" asked the judge, evidently conscious of evasion. "Sit down and be sociable."

"I deplore your choice of friends, Solomon," said the judge, "but I'm glad you've come. Here I couldn't have got your jokes with that jug of whisky under conditions. Here's the jug, with some liquor left in it—have you the price? Mr. Marshall, what more do you want?"

Mr. Marshall ignored the jug. "Sit down," urged the Judge.

"If it's any satisfaction to you, I do," admitted the Judge.

When they had seated themselves, evidently conscious of eyes, Mr. Marshall spoke sternly.

"I deplore your choice of friends, Solomon," said the judge. "