

# THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

By VAUGHAN KESTER  
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## CHAPTER XIX. The Warning.

Norton had ridden down to Belle Plain ostensibly to view certain of those improvements that went so farward smothering Tom Ware's existence. "Do you think Belle Plain is ever going to look as it did, Charley?" as he remembered it when we were children?" asked Betty.

"Why, of course it is, dear, you are going wonders!" "Ware stalked toward them. Having heard with Betty as recently as the day before, he contented himself with a nod in her direction. His greeting to Norton was a more ambitious undertaking. "I understand you've a new overcoat?"

"Then you understand wrong—Carrington's my guest," said Norton. "He's sipping of putting in a crop for himself next season, so he's willing to help me make mine." "Going to turn farmer, is he?" asked Ware.

"So he says," Norton was extremely disappointed when the planter manifested a disposition to play the host and returned to the house with them, since his presence was such a hardship that Norton shortly took his leave. "Issuing from the lane he turned his eyes in the direction of Thicket Point. Within two miles of Thicket Point again, he passed a turn in the road, he found himself confronted by three men, one of them sized his horse by the bit. Norton had not even a riding whip."

"Now, what do you wish to say to me?" he asked. "We want your word that you'll keep away from Belle Plain." "Well, you won't get it!" responded Norton.

In the same instant one of the men sized his fist and struck the young master in the back of the neck. "You cur!" cried Norton, as he stooped to pick up his hat. "Damn him—let him have it!"

It was mid-afternoon of the day following before Betty heard of the attack on Norton. She ordered her horse saddled and was soon out on the river bank with a groom in her wake. Betty wore a dress of blue and white, and Thicket Point. As she galloped into the yard Bruce Carrington came from the house.

"How is Mr. Norton?" she asked, extending her hand. "The doctor says he'll be up and about inside of a week. If you'll wait I'll tell him you are here." Carrington passed on into the house. He entered the room where Norton lay.

"Miss Malroy is here," he said. "Betty—bless her dear heart!" cried Charley weakly. "Just toss my clothes into the closet and draw up a chair. . . . There—thank you, Bruce—let her come along in now." And as Carrington quitted the room, Norton drew himself up on the pillows and faced the door. "This is worth seven beatings," Betty!" he exclaimed as she appeared.

He bent to kiss the hand she gave him, but groaned with the exertion. Then he looked up into her face and saw her eyes swimming with tears. "What—tears?" and he was much moved. "It's a perfect outrage!" Betty paused irresolutely. "Charley—"

"Yes, dear?" "Can't you be happy without me?" "No." "But you don't try to be!" "No use in my making any such foolish effort, I'd be doomed to failure." "Good-bye, Charley—I really must go." He looked up yearningly into her face, and yielding to a sudden impulse, she stooped and kissed him on the forehead, then she fled from the room.

"I am going to stay here as long as you need me," he presently said. "Miss Malroy asked me to, and then I am going back to the river where I belong."

Betty ate supper with Big Steve standing behind her chair and little Steve balancing himself first on one foot and then on the other, near the door.

The long French windows, their curtains drawn, stood open. She wandered down to the terrace. There was the sound of a step on the path. Betty turned. It was Carrington who stood before her, his face haggard. Without a word he stepped to her side and took her hands rather roughly.

"What am I to do without you?" his voice hoarse with whisper. "What is this thing you have done?" Betty's heart was beating with dull sickening throbs. "If you had only come!" she moaned. "Now I am going to be married tomorrow. I am to meet him at the Spring Bank church at ten o'clock."

"How can I give you up?" he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. He put a hand on her forehead, and leaning against the trunk of a tree buried his face in his hands. Betty watched him for a moment in wretched silence. "It's good-bye—" he muttered. "She went to him, and, as he bent above her, slipped her arms about his neck."

He kissed her hair, her soft cheek, then their lips met. Another hot September sun was beating upon the earth as Betty galloped down the lane and swung her horse's head in the direction of Raleigh. She would keep her promise to Charley and he should never know what his happiness had cost her.

Norton joined her before she had covered a third of the distance that separated the two plantations. "We are to go to the church. Mr. Bowen will be there. I arranged with him last night; he will drive over with his wife and daughter, who will be our witnesses, dear."

Afterward Betty could remember standing before the church in the fierce morning light; she heard Mr. Bowen's voice, she heard Charley's voice, she heard another voice—her own though she scarcely recognized it. "I'll tie the horses, Betty," said Norton.

He had reached the edge of the oaks when from the silent depths of the denser woods came the sharp report of a rifle. The shock of the bullet sent the young fellow staggering back among fellow staggering back among the mossy and myrtle-covered graves.

For a moment no one grasped what had happened, only there was Norton, who seemed to grope strangely among the graves. He had fallen now. Even as the shadows deepened he was aware that Betty was coming swiftly toward him. "I'm shot—" he said, speaking with difficulty.

"Charley—Charley—" she moaned, slipping her arms about him and gathering him to her breast. He looked up into her face. "It's all over—" he said, but as much in wonder as in fear. "But I knew you would come to me—dear—" he added in a whisper. "She felt a shudder pass through him. He did not speak again."

CHAPTER XX.  
The Judge Offers a Reward.

The news of Charley Norton's murder spread quickly over the county. For two or three days bands of armed men scoured the woods and roads, and then this activity quite unproductive of any tangible results ceased, matters were allowed to rest with the constituted authorities, namely Mr. Betts the sheriff and his deputies.

No private citizen had shown greater zeal than Judge Slocum Price. One morning he found under his door a folded paper:

"You talk too much. Shut up, or you'll go where Norton went."

A few moments later he burst in on Mr. Saul. "Glance at that, my friend!" he cried, as he tossed the paper on the clerk's desk. "What do you make of it, sir?"

"Well, I'd keep still." The judge laughed derisively as he bowed himself out. He established himself in his office. He had scarcely done so when Mr. Betts knocked at the door. The sheriff came direct from Mr. Saul and arrived out of breath, but the letter was not mentioned by the judge. He spoke of the crops, the chance of rain, and the intricacies of county politics.

The sheriff withdrew mystified, wondering why it was he had not felt at liberty to broach the subject which was apparent in his mind. His place was taken by Mr. Pegloe, and on the heels of the tavern-keeper came Mr. Bowen. Judge Price received them with condescension, but back of the condescension was an air of reserve that did not invite questions.

The judge discussed the extension of the national roads with Mr. Pegloe, and the religion of the Persian fire-worshippers with Mr. Bowen; he permitted never a pause and they retired as the sheriff had done without a sign of the letter.

The judge's office became a perfect Mecca for the idle and the curious, and while he over-slewed with high-bred courtesy he had never seemed so unapproachable—never so remote from matters of local and contemporary interest.

"Why didn't you show 'em the letter?" demanded Mr. Mahaffy, when they were alone. "Can't you see they are suffering for a sight of it?" "Ah! in good time, Solomon!" He became thoughtful. "Solomon! I am thinking of offering a reward for any information that will lead to the discovery of my anonymous correspondent," he at length observed with a finely casual air, as if the idea had just occurred to him, and had not been seething in his brain all day.

"There you go, Price—" began Mahaffy. "Solomon, this is no time for me to hang back. I shall offer a reward of \$5,000 for this information." The judge's tone was resolute. "Yes, sir, I shall make the figure commensurate with the poignant grief I feel. He was my friend and client."

The next morning it was discovered that some time during the night the judge had tacked his anonymous communication on the court-house door; just below it was another sheet of paper covered with bold script: "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: Judge Slocum Price assumes that the above was intended for him, since he found it under his office door on the morning of the twenty-fifth inst."

"Judge Price begs leave to state it as his unqualified conviction that the writer is a coward and a cur, and offers a reward of five thousand dollars for any information that will lead to his identification." (To Be Continued Tomorrow.)

HOW TO TRAIN A WIFE.

"Well," said the confirmed commuter, burbling over the doorway, "the landlord has agreed to paint the house. The painters will be here tomorrow! Tell Marie to get everything ready for them, will you?" The Hopeful Housewife, who had discoursed with vain eloquence for years upon the shoddy complexion of their suburban home, gasped with astonishment.

# ASK YOUR NEIGHBORS

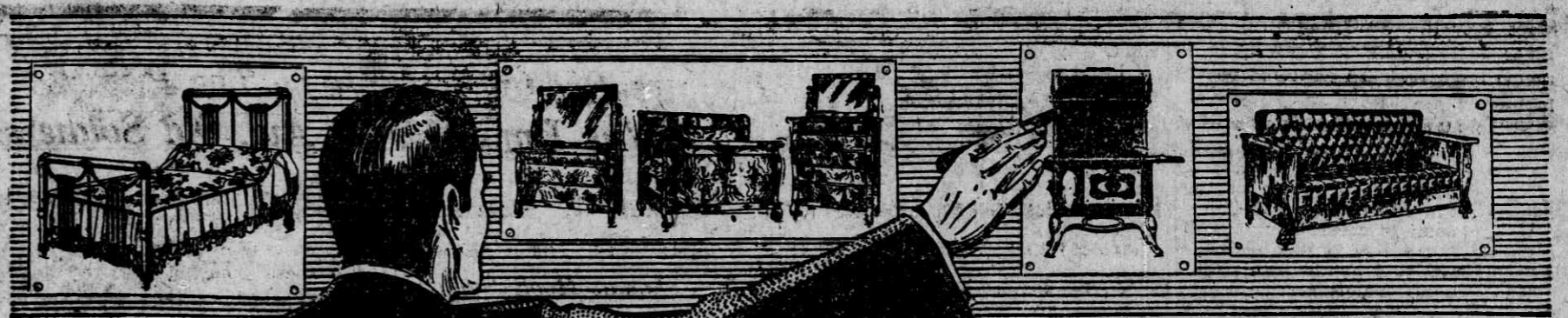
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DOG'S BURIAL IN FLAG STIRS PATRIOTIC STORM.  
Woman's Relief Corps Scandalized and Appeals to the War Department.

Washington, D. C., Nov. 17.—Muggs the little terrier mascot of the aeronautical corps of the army, is dead and buried at College Park in a United States flag. Mrs. Isabel Worrell Ball of the Woman's Relief Corps, auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic, is highly indignant and has appealed to the secretary of war, demanding an investigation. She objects seriously to the flag being used as a shroud for a dog.

"The symbol of the great power and authority of the United States," said Mrs. Ball, "is too lofty a thing to be used to cover a dead dog."

Muggs was a fine little dog, with amiable ways, and joyful disposition. He was the first dog to ride in an airplane. The army aviators thought much of him. Soldiers interred him with military honors.

Muggs met his death beneath a Baltimore and Ohio railway train Friday. At the funeral James W. Whalen had charge of the ceremonies. Private Charles Morgan made a coffin of white pine. Private Bullivant made a headstone out of hardwood, and Private O'Brien painted an inscription on it. The inscription closed with this: A friend in need, Is the dog, indeed; He'll be sadly missed, In a place like this.

"The action of the soldiers at College Park," wrote Mrs. Ball to Secretary Stimson, "is the worst insult to the flag that I have ever known the wearers of the uniform to give. I feel I have but to call your attention to have the thoughtless soldiers' properly reprimanded."

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