

# THE PRODIGAL JUDGE

CHAPTER XXXI.

Solomon's Last Night.

It had been with no little reluctance that Solomon Mahaffy accompanied Yancy and Cavendish to Belle Plain; he would have preferred to remain in Raleigh in attendance upon Judge Price, intimately acquainted with the judge's mental processes, he could follow all the devious workings of that magnificent mind; he could fathom the simply selfish ingenuity he was capable of putting forth to accomplish temporary benefits. Permitting his thoughts to dwell upon the tangled strength and weakness which was so curiously blended in Solomon Price's character, he had brooded visions of that great soul, freed from the trammels of restraint, confiding his melancholy history to Mr. Pegler in the hope of bolstering his fallen credit at the City Tavern.

Always where the judge was concerned he fluctuated between extremes of doubt and confidence. He felt that under the urgent spur of occasion his friend could rise to any emergency, while a sustained activity made demands which he could not satisfy; then his efforts were discounted by his insane desire to realize at once on his opportunities; in his haste he was tor ever plucking unripe fruit; and though he might keep one eye on the main chance the other was fixed just as resolutely on the nearest tavern.

With the great stags which late had suddenly introduced into their losing game, he wished earnestly to believe that the judge would stay quietly in his office and complete the task he had set himself; that with this of his hands the promise of excitement at Belle Plain would compel his presence there, when he would pass some, what under the restraining influence which he was determined to exert; in short, to Solomon, life embraced just the one vital consideration, which was to maintain the judge in a state of sobriety until after his meeting with Pentress.

The purple of twilight was stealing over the land when he and his two companions reached Belle Plain. They learned that Tom Ware had returned from Memphis, that the tavern had been dragged but without results, and that as yet nothing had been heard from Carrington or the dogs he had gone for.

Presently Cavendish and Yancy set off across the fields. They were going on to the raft, to Polly and the six little Cavendishes, whom they had not seen since early morning; but they promised to be back at Belle Plain within an hour.

By very nature an alien, Mahaffy sought out a dark corner on the wide porch that overlooked the river to await their return. The house had been thrown open, and supper was being served to whoever cared to stay and partake of it. The murmur of idle purposeless talk drifted out to him; he was irritated and offended by it. There was something garish in this indiscriminate hospitality in the very home of tragedy. As the moments slipped by his sense of displeasure increased, with mankind in general, with himself, and with the judge—principally with the judge—who was to make a fool of himself in the morning. He was going to give the men who had wrecked his life a chance to take it on their own terms. He had a cold, but he would not let it prevent him from doing his duty.

In the midst of his angry meditations he heard a clock strike in the hall and counted the strokes. It was nine o'clock. Surely Yancy and Cavendish had been gone their hour! He quitted his seat and strolled restlessly about the house. He felt deeply indignant with everybody and every thing. Human intelligence seemed but a pitiable advance on brute instinct. A whole day had passed and what had been accomplished? Carrington, the judge, Yancy, Cavendish—the four men who might have worked together to some purpose—had widely separated themselves; and here was the duel, the very climax of absurdity. He resumed his dark corner and waited another hour. Still no Carrington, and Yancy and Cavendish had not come up from the raft.

"Fools!" thought Mahaffy bitterly. "All of them fools!" At last he decided to go back to the judge; and a moment later was hurrying down the lane in the direction of the highroad, but, jaded as he was by the effort he had already put for that day, he walked to Raleigh made tremendous demands on him, and it was midnight when he entered the little town.

It cannot be said that he was altogether surprised when he found their cottage dark and apparently deserted. He had half expected this. Entering, and not stopping to secure a candle, he groped his way upstairs to the room on the second floor which he and the judge shared.

"Price!" he called, but this gained him no response, and he cursed softly under his breath.

He hastily descended to the kitchen, lighted a candle, and stepped into the adjoining room. On the table was a neat pile of papers, and topping the pile was the president's script. Being burdened by no false scruples, and thinking it might afford some clue to the judge's whereabouts, Mahaffy took it up and read it. Having mastered its contents he instantly

glanced in the direction of the City Tavern, but it was wrapped in darkness.

"Price is drunk somewhere," was his definite conclusion. "But he'll be at Boggs' the first thing in the morning—most likely so far gone he can hardly stand!"

The letter, with its striking news, made little or no impression on him just then; it merely furnished the clue he had sought. The judge was off somewhere marketing his prospects.

After a time Mahaffy went upstairs, and, without removing his clothes, threw himself on the bed. He was worn down to the point of exhaustion, yet he could not sleep, though the deep silence warned him that day was not far off. What if—but he would not let the thought shape itself in his mind. He had witnessed the judge's skill with the pistol, and he had even a certain irrational faith in that gentleman's destiny. He prayed God that Pentress might die quickly and decently with the judge's bullet through his brain. Over and over in savage supplication he muttered his prayer that Pentress might die.

Mahaffy watched for the coming of the dawn, but before the darkness lifted he had risen from the bed and gone downstairs, where he made himself a cup of wretched coffee. Then he blew out his candle and watched the gray light spread. He was impatient now to be off, and fully an hour before the sun, set out for Boggs', a tall, gaunt figure in the shadowy uncertainty of that October morning. He was the first to reach the place of meeting, but he had scarcely entered the meadow when Pentress rode up, attended by Tom Ware. They dismounted, and the colonel lifted his hat. Mahaffy barely acknowledged the salute; he was in no mood for courtesies that meant nothing. Ware was clearly of the same mind.

There was an awkward pause, then Pentress and Ware spoke together in a low tone. The planter's speech was broken and hoarse, and his heavy, blood-shot eyes were the eyes of a haunted man; this was all a part of Pentress' scheme to face the world, and Ware still believed that the fires Hicks had kindled had served his desperate need.

When the first long shadows stole out from the edge of the woods Pentress turned to Mahaffy, whose glance was directed toward the distant corner of the field, where he knew his friend must first appear.

"Why are you waiting, sir?" he demanded, his tone cold and formal.

"Something has occurred to detain Price," answered Mahaffy.

The colonel and Ware exchanged looks. Again they spoke together, while Mahaffy watched the road. Ten minutes slipped by in this manner, and once more Pentress addressed Mahaffy.

"Do you know what could have detained him?" he inquired, the ghost of a smile curling his thin lips.

"I don't," said Mahaffy, and relapsed into a moody and anxious silence. He held himself in very proper abhorrence, and only his feeling of intense but never-declared loyalty to his friend had brought him there.

Another interval of waiting succeeded.

"I have about reached the end of my patience; I shall wait just ten minutes longer," said Pentress, and drew out his watch.

"Something has happened—" began Mahaffy.

"I have kept my engagement; he should have kept his," Pentress continued, addressing Ware. "I am sor-



The Pistol Slipped From His Fingers.

ry to have brought you here for nothing, Tom."

"Wait!" said Mahaffy, planting himself squarely before Pentress.

"I consider this comic episode at an end," and Pentress pocketed his watch.

"Scarcely!" rejoined Mahaffy. His long arm shot out and the open palm of his hand descended on the colonel's face. "I am here for my friend," he said grimly.

The colonel's face paled and colored by turns.

"Have you a weapon?" he asked, when he could command his voice. Mahaffy exhibited the pistol he had carried to Belle Plain the day before.

"Step off the ground, Tom," Pentress spoke quietly. When Ware had done as requested, the colonel spoke again. "You are my witness that I was the victim of an unprovoked attack."

Mr. Ware accepted this statement with equanimity, not to say indifference.

"Are you ready?" he asked; he glanced at Mahaffy, who by a slight inclination of the head signified that he was. "I reckon you're a green hand at this sort of thing," commented Tom evilly.

"Yes," said Mahaffy tersely. "Well, listen: I shall count, one, two, three; at the word three you will fire. Now take your positions."

Mahaffy and the colonel stood facing each other, a distance of twelve paces separating them. Mahaffy was pale but dogged; he eyed Pentress unflinchingly. Quick on the word Pentress fired, an instant later Mahaffy's pistol exploded; apparently neither bullet had taken effect, the two men maintained the rigid attitude they had assumed; then Mahaffy was seen to turn on his heels, next his arm dropped to his side and the pistol slipped from his fingers, a look of astonishment passed over his face and left it vacant and staring while his right hand stole up toward his heart; he raised it slowly, with difficulty, as though it were held down by some invisible weight.

A hush spread across the field. It was like one of nature's invisible transitions. Along the edge of the woods the song of birds was stricken into silence. Ware, heavy-eyed—Pentress, his lips twisted by a tortured smile, watched Mahaffy as he panted for breath, with his hand clenched against his breast. That dead, oppressive silence lasted but a moment; from out of it came a cry that smote on the wounded man's ears and reached his consciousness.

"It's Price—" he gasped, his words bathed in blood, and he pitched forward on his face.

Ware and Pentress had heard the cry, too, and running to their horses threw themselves into the saddle and galloped off. The judge midway of the meadow reared out a furious protest, but the mounted men turned into the highroad and vanished from sight, and the judge's shaking legs bore him swiftly in the direction of the gaunt figure on the ground.

Mahaffy struggled to rise, for he was hearing his friend's voice now, the voice of utter anguish, calling his name. At last painful effort brought him to his knees. He saw the judge, clothed principally in a gay colored bed-quilt, hatless and shoeless, his face sodden and bleary from his night's doze. Mahaffy stood erect and staggered toward him, his hand over his wound, his features drawn and livid, then with a cry he dropped at his friend's feet.

"Solomon! Solomon!" And the judge knelt beside him.

"It's all right, Price; I kept your appointment," whispered Mahaffy; a bloody spume was gathering on his lips, and he stared up at his friend with glassy eyes.

In very shame the judge hid his face in his hands, while sobs shook him.

"Solomon—Solomon, why did you do this?" he cried miserably. The harsh lines on the dying man's face erased themselves.

"You're the only friend I've known in twenty years of loneliness, Price. I've loved you like a brother," he panted, with a pause between each word.

Again the judge buried his face in his hands.

"I know it, Solomon—I know it!" he moaned wretchedly.

"Price, you are still a man to be reckoned with. There's the boy; take your place for his sake and keep it—you can."

"I will—by God, I will!" gasped the judge. "You hear me? You hear me, Solomon? By God's good help, I will!"

"You have the president's letter—I saw it—" said Mahaffy in a whisper.

"Yes!" cried the judge. "Solomon, the world is changing for us!"

"For me most of all," murmured Mahaffy, and there was a bleak instant when the judge's ashen countenance held the full pathos of age and failure. "Remember your oath, Price," gasped the dying man. A moment of silence succeeded. Mahaffy's eyes closed, then the heavy lids slid back. He looked up at the judge while the harsh lines of his sour old face softened wonderfully. "Kiss me, Price," he whispered, and as the judge bent to touch him on the brow, the softened lines fixed themselves in death, while on his lips lingered a smile that was neither bitter nor sneering.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

The Judge's Grandson.

In that bare upper room they had shared, the judge, crushed and broken, watched beside the bed on which the dead man lay; unconscious of the flight of time he sat with his head bowed in his hands, having scarcely altered his position since he begged those who carried Mahaffy up the narrow stairs to leave him alone with his friend.

He was living over the past. He recalled his first meeting with Mahaffy in the stuffy cabin of the small river packet from which they had later gone ashore at Pleasantville; he thanked God that it had been given him to see beneath Solomon's forbidding exterior and into that starved heart! He reviewed each phase of the almost insensible growth of their intimacy; he remembered Mahaffy's fine true loyalty at the time of his arrest—he thought of Damon and Pythias—Mahaffy had reached the heights of a sublime devotion; he could only feel ennobled that he had inspired it.

At last the dusk of twilight invaded the room. He lighted the candle on the chimney-piece, then he resumed his seat and his former attitude. Suddenly he became aware of a small hand that was resting on his

arm and glanced up; Hannibal had stolen quietly into the room. The boy pointed to the still figure on the bed.

"Judge, what makes Mr. Mahaffy lie so quiet—is he dead?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes, dear lad," began the judge in a shaking voice, as he drew Hannibal toward him, "your friend and mine is dead—we have lost him." He lifted the boy into his lap, and Hannibal pressed a tear-stained face against the judge's shoulder. "How did you get here?" the judge questioned gently.

"Uncle Bob fetched me," said Hannibal. "He's down-stairs, but he didn't tell me Mr. Mahaffy was dead." "We have sustained a great loss, Hannibal, and we must never forget the moral grandeur of the man. Some day, when you are older, and I can bring myself to speak of it, I will tell you of his last moments." The judge's voice broke, a thick sob rose chokingly in his throat. "Poor Solomon! A man of such tender feeling that he hid it from the world, for his was a rare nature which only revealed itself to the chosen few he honored with his love." The judge lapsed into a mo-



"Do You Mean We Ain't Going to Be Pore Any Longer, Grandfather?"

mentary brooding silence, in which his great arms drew the boy closer against his heart. "Dear lad, since I left you at Belle Plain a very astonishing knowledge has come to me. It was the Hand of Providence—I see it now—that first brought us together. You must not call me judge any more; I am your grandfather—your mother was my daughter."

Hannibal instantly sat erect and looked up at the judge, his blue eyes wide with amazement at this extraordinary statement.

"It is a very strange story, Hannibal, and its links are not all in my hands, but I am sure because of what I already know. I, who thought that not a drop of my blood flowed in any veins but my own, live again in you. Do you understand what I am telling you? You are my own dear little grandson—" and the judge looked down with no uncertain love and pride into the small face upturned to his.

"I am glad if you are my grandfather, judge," said Hannibal very gravely. "I always liked you."

"Thank you, dear lad," responded the judge with equal gravity, and then as Hannibal nestled back in his grandfather's arms a single big tear dropped from the end of that gentleman's prominent nose.

"There will be many and great changes in store for us," continued the judge. "But as we meet adversity with dignity, I am sure we shall be able to endure prosperity with equal dignity—only unworthy natures are affected by what is at best superficial and accidental. I mean that the light of poverty is about to be lifted from our lives."

"Do you mean we ain't going to be pore any longer, grandfather?" asked Hannibal.

The judge regarded him with infinite tenderness of expression; he was profoundly moved.

"Would you mind saying that again, dear lad?"

"Do you mean we ain't going to be pore any longer, grandfather?" repeated Hannibal.

"I shall enjoy an adequate competency which I am about to recover. It will be sufficient for the indulgence of those simple and intellectual tastes I propose to cultivate for the future." In spite of himself the judge sighed. This was hardly in line with his ideals, but the right to choose was no longer his. "You will be very rich, Hannibal. The Quintard lands—your grandmother was a Quintard—will be yours; they run up into the hundred of thousands of acres hereabout; this land will be yours as soon as I can establish your identity."

"Will Uncle Bob be rich too?" inquired Hannibal.

"Certainly. How can he be poor when we possess wealth?" answered the judge.

"You reckon he will always live with us, don't you, grandfather?" "I would not have it otherwise. I admire Mr. Yancy—he is simple and direct, and fit for any company under heaven except that of fools. His treatment of you has placed me under everlasting obligations; he shall share what we have. My one bitter, unavailing regret is that Solomon Mahaffy will not be here to partake of our altered fortunes." And the judge sighed deeply.

"Uncle Bob told me Mr. Mahaffy got hurt in a duel, grandfather?" said Hannibal.

"He was as inexperienced as a child in the use of firearms, and he had to deal with scoundrels who had

neither mercy nor generous feeling—but his courage was magnificent."

Presently Hannibal was deep in his account of those adventures he had shared with Miss Betty.

"And Miss Mairoy—where is she now?" asked the judge, in the first pause of the boy's narrative.

"She's at Mr. Bowen's house. Mr. Carrington and Mr. Cavendish are here too. Mrs. Cavendish stayed down yonder at the Bates' plantation. Grandfather, it were Captain Murrell who had me stole—do you reckon he was going to take me back to Mr. Bladen?"

"I will see Miss Mairoy in the morning. We must combine our interests are identical. There should be help in this for more than one scoundrel! I can see now how criminal my disinclination to push myself to the front has been!" said the judge, with conviction. "Never again will I shrink from what I know to be a public duty."

A little later they went down-stairs, where the judge had Yancy make up a bed for himself and Hannibal on the floor. He would watch alone beside Mahaffy, he was certain this would have been the dead man's wish; then he said good night and mounted heavily to the floor above to resume his vigil and his musings.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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## Notice.

North Carolina—Union County. Having qualified as administrator of Sam'l Givens, late of Union county, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of July, 1912 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment.

LORENZO MEDLIN, Administrator.

This the 26th day of July, 1912.

## Notice of Administration.

Having this day qualified as administrator of the estate of Lonnie Stegall, deceased, notice is hereby given to all parties holding claims against said estate to present their claims to the undersigned at Monroe, N. C., on or before the 31st day of July, A. D. 1912, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to said estate will please make prompt settlement.

This 30th day of July, 1912. The Savings, Loan & Trust Co., Adm. of Lonnie Stegall, deceased Redwine & Sikes, Attys.

## Notice of Administration.

Having on the 29th day of July, A. D. 1912, qualified as administrator of the estate of Cliff Griffin, deceased, notice is hereby given to all parties holding claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned at Wingate, N. C., on or before the 7th day of August, 1912, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their right of recovery.

All persons indebted to said estate will please make prompt settlement.

This the 3rd day of Aug., 1912. B. D. AUSTIN, Administrator Cliff Griffin, Deceased. Redwine & Sikes, Attys.

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No. 38, Birmingham-Atlanta to Portsmouth-New York..... 6:10 a.m.  
No. 48, Charlotte to Monroe..... 6:30 a.m.  
No. 35, New York to Birmingham..... 6:30 a.m.  
No. 46, Wilmington to Charlotte..... 11:15 a.m.  
No. 52, Atlanta to Monroe (local)..... 5:45 p.m.  
No. 44, Charlotte to Wilmington..... 5:50 p.m.  
No. 102, Rutherfordton to Monroe..... 8:40 p.m.  
No. 39, Wilmington to Charlotte..... 9:35 p.m.  
No. 41, New York-Portsmouth to Atlanta-Birmingham..... 10:35 p.m.  
No. 32, Birmingham to New York..... 9:50 p.m.

### Departures.

No. 40, Charlotte to Wilmington..... 5:50 a.m.  
No. 38, Birmingham-Atlanta to Portsmouth-New York..... 6:15 a.m.  
No. 33, New York to Birmingham..... 6:30 a.m.  
No. 103, Monroe to Rutherfordton..... 9:35 a.m.  
No. 45, Wilmington to Charlotte..... 11:20 a.m.  
No. 51, Monroe to Atlanta (local)..... 11:15 a.m.  
No. 44, Charlotte to Wilmington..... 5:55 p.m.  
No. 48, Monroe to Charlotte..... 6:35 p.m.  
No. 32, Birmingham to New York..... 9:35 p.m.  
No. 36, Wilmington to Charlotte..... 10:05 p.m.  
No. 41, New York-Portsmouth to Birmingham..... 11:00 p.m.

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