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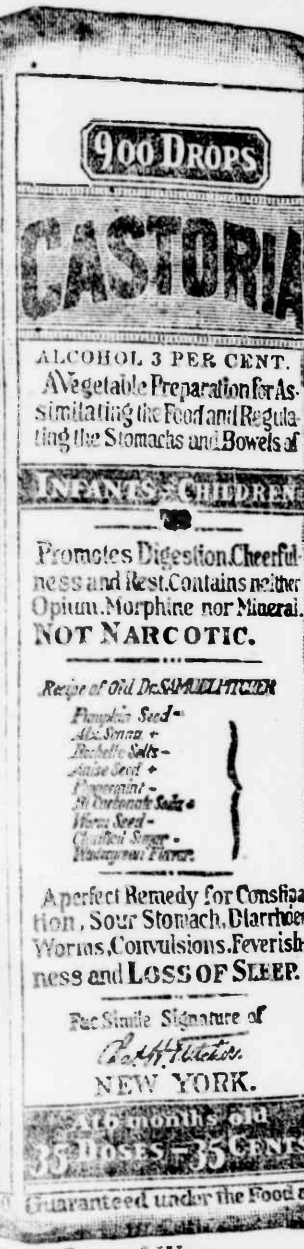
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## THE LORDS OF HIGH DECISION

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

While he waited he scrutinized the books with a view to determining in just what field of thought his mind now disported. Miss Morley's hand with Mrs. Blair was the object of the search and as they concluded their conference in the hall he appeared before them promptly. His sister's glance did not encourage his hope of the situation lightly; but he would not do less than accept full responsibility for the visit and he put a bold face upon the matter. Blair had just rung for her maid and she sent the maid upstairs to get the trunk with the obvious intention of making it unnecessary for Wayne to accompany the girl further.

"What," he began, "Miss Morley and I have become acquainted in the most astonishing fashion. We met at the parish house not long ago and she has been so kind as to give me the best chance, this afternoon, at the concert, estimating the value of the day, I ran into her again and I begged Miss Morley's consent to walk up here with her; and here I am."

"I really was unnecessary," murmured the girl.  
"Do you think you ought to tell Miss Morley to give me just a little of her time, Fanny—just a little. Of course she is busy; but then—"

Blair looked from one to the other. The girl was so plainly embarrassed, Wayne's good humor and high spirits were so appealing, that Fanny Blair found this one of her most difficult occasions. "I'm sure Miss Morley is quite able to manage her affairs without my help from me. Are you dining here, Wayne?"

adorable head was just in front of me. But no, I did not let her see me. I knew she would lose faith in me if she thought I was pursuing her; I went about my business, but on my way out ran into her again. What could be more natural than that I should walk to my sister's house with her?"

"You must have known she was going to the settlement house; it's a little hard to accept so many coincidences. And I had asked you to let her alone."

"Paddock invited me to visit him; she and her friend were cleaning up the dishes. It was her first visit, too."

"So you took her home in your car? You did that?"

"And her friend with her, Joe is a kind of usher and policeman at the settlement house. Paddock seems to be gathering in all sorts and conditions—even me!"

"Joe!" exclaimed Mrs. Blair with more animation; and then: "You must get rid of that fellow. I don't like him."

Mrs. Blair spoke with so much energy that Wayne laughed aloud. "Why, Fanny, Joe has saved my life many times. He been so miserable when I went had that I've been ashamed to face him."

Mrs. Blair relapsed into silence, and he saw by the flashes of the electric lamps at the corners that she was seriously troubled.

"You know without my telling you that you must let this girl alone. These chance meetings won't occur again—if they have been chance meetings!"

"I swear it, Fanny!"

"She's terribly poor; she has ambitions, and I'm trying to help her. She's utterly unscrupulous, as you can see; you will ruin her future and make her wretchedly unhappy if you don't avoid her."

"When do you think a man can begin to be good? Do you think I am so utterly rotten that no decent woman may ever dare know me? Come now, Fanny."

"There are plenty of girls you can know if you want to—who don't live in boarding houses and starve their way through art schools."

"But they haven't her eyes; they don't carry their heads like goddesses," he persisted.

"You've seen too many eyes in too many divine heads. I tell you, it won't do! If you will think of it a minute you will see that only a word is enough to wreck that girl's life. Do you suppose you can call on her at her boarding house? Are you going to walk with her to her lessons? Do you quite see yourself taking her to concerts and to church Sunday mornings? My big brother, if you don't stop being preposterous I shall get angry."

"Oh, no. Please don't! I'm disappointed; I thought you had advised me to be good and marry and settle down."

"Marry! That girl? Wayne, you are impossible!"

"Very likely; but the girl isn't so impossible. I hadn't thought of marrying her, but the idea doesn't exactly terrify me. She's an immensely interesting person—she haunts me like a theme in music. She's poor and if I could save her from the pitfalls of art—the failures, the heartache of falling to arrive—that isn't so impossible, is it?"

"Yes, it's absolutely out of the question. And if you don't let her alone I'll ship her back where she came from; just one more of these coincidences and I'll do that. We've had enough marriages in the family; I hope, to last for some time."

"Ah! So this bitterness of spirit is not all for me? Has John taken to evil ways?"

"What's the matter at father's? Why was Addie crying this morning when I went in to see her?"

"I dare say she cried because you

came, if you were as fierce as you are now."  
"She had been crying and looked miserably unhappy."  
"Probably a row with the cook. She isn't used to keeping house. She's going to Boston with the colonel and that will set her up again."  
Mrs. Blair was silent for a moment then flashed:  
"How much do you see of her?"  
"Precious little. Breakfast, and a glimpse sometimes as I go to my couch at night."  
"You must leave the house; you must come and live with us at once," declared Mrs. Blair with impressive finality.  
"Thanks!" Wayne laughed. "Do you think I tease my stepmother to make her cry? Do you think my moral example is bad for her? Addie snubs me every chance she gets. Only this morning at breakfast, while the colonel read a papal encyclical or something equally exciting, Addie and I discussed the relative merits of country sausage and chocolate eclaires. To see me sitting at the breakfast table between the colonel and my stepmother is edifying beyond any words. Addie is a good girl; I like Addie. But she isn't in the same class with your protegee. Here's the club; shall I detach John McCandless from the sacred rye-pots and send him out?"  
"You know that John never drinks; and he's in Buffalo today."  
"Then he will drink beyond any doubt; one must—in Buffalo!"  
While he stood chaffing her at the car door, she clasped his hand tightly and begged him to see her soon. As the car started a newsboy hailed Wayne familiarly from the street and Fanny saw her brother's broad shoulders bent over the lad and his elbow crooked as he felt for a coin. How true it was that everyone liked Wayne! His generosity was boundless; the very recklessness and extravagance of his derelictions endeared him to many. As the club door closed upon him the newsboy dashed off with an exultant shout on the wings of new fortune.

### CHAPTER XVI.

#### The Trip to Boston.

Mrs. Craighill bore the scrutiny of her new fellow-citizens with dignity, and by the first of December she had ceased to be a curiosity. She had met every one of importance; even Mrs. Wingfield had been obliged to bow to her at a reception. Those who persisted in their determination to ignore her advent were too few to count. It had been hinted that she would prove loud; that she was dull; that she would make her husband's money fly—"such women" always did; but no one worth considering was willing at the end of two months to say that she was properly to be classed among "such women." Her severest critics were those who, habituated to the contemplation of Roger Craighill's presence in a front pew at church, feared that by marrying one of "such women"—a young adventuress headed brazenly for the divorce court—their old might suffer the pains and penalties of scandal and alimony. Even the most conservative now admitted that if Mrs. Craighill's motives in marrying her elderly husband had not been the noblest, she was carrying herself well. Members of her own set, who had been among the original doubters, had waited for the complete disclosure of Mrs. Craighill's wardrobe before committing themselves, but the taste and sobriety of her raiment disarmed criticism; she was not loud. In another of the circles within the circle it was questioned whether the newcomer was fitted intellectually to be Roger Craighill's wife, but Fanny Blair vouched for the worthiness of her stepmother's interests. "Addie reads everything," declared Mrs. Blair sweepingly, whereupon Mrs. Craighill was promptly nominated for membership in the Woman's club. Many were saying that her conduct, in circumstances the most difficult, had been admirable and the frequency with which, in these first weeks, Fanny Blair had gone about with her advertised the completeness of the new wife's acceptance in the family. It was even whispered that Wayne had reformed, and this startling announcement, where it found credence, was attributed to his stepmother's influence.

Roger Craighill and his wife were dining alone at home the evening before the day of their departure for Boston. He had long made a point of dressing for dinner and she wore a gown he had not seen before and whose perfection he praised.

"Your taste is exquisite, Addie. I like you in light things; they seem to be a part of you—to express you. You are the most graceful, and charming woman in the world."

Her face brightened. They had been dining out a great deal and it was a pleasure to have this evening at their own table. She felt again the dignity of her position as Roger Craighill's wife. She had been hurt deeply by his exclusion of her on the night he had written his address; but she thought now how handsome he was, how well he carried his years, and it was no mean thing to have been chosen by such a man to share his home and fame. She had found it all too easy to take refuge in Wayne's ready comradeship; the stolen references to their earlier acquaintance that she had suffered him to make had shown her how dangerous it was to trust to his consolations. Wayne must be kept at a distance; she would take care that he did not see her again alone.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)