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## THE LORDS OF HIGH DECISION

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

CHAPTER XXIII.—Continued.

"I am sure you mean to be kind," she said unresponsively. His little eyes met them timidly, and she turned her head away with something akin to a smile. The lines of his mask-like face softened as by some magic of grace within. At his next breath the blood poured into her cheeks as though he had kissed her. "I am glad to see you with the greatest of ease and with the best intentions. You are in distress. You have had a passage which has annoyed you very much. It is not important just now. I came to know it; the important thing is to save you from any further trouble."

"I don't understand—I don't know what you mean," she faltered. "I am sure you are threatening you; you had an unpleasant encounter with your husband, and propose to come here and make a home. Please do not be troubled. If it were not in my power to help you, you may be sure I would spare you the shock of hearing from me."

"I am sure you are a good woman, and will help me," she said simply, and left her. "I am sure you are a good woman, and will help me," she said simply, and left her.

CHAPTER XXIV. Jean Answers a Question. "I am sure you are a good woman, and will help me," she said simply, and left her.

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and you bring her back to me as you sit there—just where she used to sit. The sight of you, makes all these later years of my life hideous to me. I can't do the thing I meant to—I see how foul it was, and I'm saying this to you now because I'm afraid of losing you—I'm afraid of your going away where you can't help me any more."

She had been obliged to read much into his strange appeal; it was a tough he turned the leaves of a book swiftly, disclosing only half-pages, with type blurred and indecipherable. She looked at him wonderingly; there was a cry in his last words that touched her. It had been easy the day before to simulate feeling in his assault upon Mrs. Craighill's emotions at Rosedale but he had no wish to deceive his girl. Her eyes forbade it; and it was not so long ago that the sharp lash of her scorn had struck him in the face: "I don't care for your acquaintance, Mr. Wayne Craighill." She was saying now:

"I am glad if I have helped you, though I don't in the least understand how that could be. It is not for me to help anyone. No one who isn't strong can help another; we must be sure of ourselves first, and I am weak and I have made sad mistakes. I have done harm and caused heartache. And more than that, we belong to different worlds; you and I have tried to say this to you before, but we must understand it now. Our meetings have certainly been strange, but as I told you, I'm not superstitious. Very likely we shall never meet again, and you will go on your way just as though you never had seen me, and I will go about my business—and so on."

"But if you knew I was going to the bad, and you could save me and I asked you to help, would you feel the same way about it? Maybe the answer is that I'm not worth saving."

She smiled at this, but his appeal touched her. He was nearly ten years her senior, and belonged as she had said, to an entirely different world, and he wanted her help and begged for it. She felt his charm and realized the danger that lay in it, and she wished to be kind, but here was a case where sympathy must be offered guardedly. This interview was altogether too serious for comfort and she rose, facing him with an entire change of manner. It seemed that she

"I wish you wouldn't! Please do not! It is very unfair and unkind. You know perfectly well that I cannot discuss such a matter with you; and what difference does it make one way or another?"

"I have no claim on your mercy. I cannot explain anything. I want the right to earn your good opinion; that is what I am asking."

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"I have no claim on your mercy. I cannot explain anything. I want the right to earn your good opinion; that is what I am asking."

"But why should you be asking? What difference does it make whether my opinion of you is good or bad? It is absurd the way we meet. Every meeting has been a little more unfortunate than the last—if for no other reason than that it has been another one that is quite possible that I have lost your sister's friendly interest by that walk home from the concert. You must have seen that she didn't like it; and she was perfectly right not to like it. Nothing could have been more ill-advised and foolish than our going to her house together."

"Oh, if it's only Fanny! Fanny understands everything perfectly!" "That isn't very comforting, is it?" she asked with the least tinge of irony. She seemed more mature than he had thought her before, and she was purposely making conversation difficult. In a few minutes his father and Mrs. Craighill would return and he must make the most of his time. His tone was lower as he began again on a new tack, and she listened with reluctant attention. "When I met you I was well started to the bad and I had every intention of keeping on. I was going to do a particular thing and it was vile—it was the worst. Why is it that you are standing in the way of it? Oh, I know you don't understand—if you did you wouldn't let me speak to you; but it's because you don't understand—it's because you couldn't understand—it's so strange that you are blocking me. And not only that, but here you are in this house—this house that was my mother's,

was the older now, the one grown wise through long familiarity with the world. "I'm a busy person, Mr. Craighill; I'm working just as hard as I can and I hope to do something pretty good one of these days, in spite of the gloomy view I take occasionally of my prospects. Now, why don't you go in for something? Work, work, work! It's the only way to be happy. You haven't won the right to the leisure you're throwing away. It's cheating life to waste opportunities as you do. I saved just a dollar a week for two years to get a chance to study drawing; I scrubbed and washed dishes in a hotel and ran a machine in a garment factory. And you may be sure that if I have to do it I'll go back to the sewing machine next summer and begin all over again without the slightest grudge against world. I'm not going to be a beggar; I want to earn my right to a share in beautiful things."

"Why, Mr. Craighill," she continued with increasing vehemence, "all the men I have ever known have been laboring men—men who work with their hands—these things!" In her passionate earnestness she held out her hands as though they were part of her case for labor. "My father was an anthracite miner, and he died at work. I've seen sad things in my life. I had a little brother who was crushed to death in a breaker. He was oiler boy, and he was so eager to get time to play at noon with the other boys that he crawled in to do his work before the machinery stopped and he was ground to pieces—fourteen years old. Mr. Craighill, I can't get over that—that he was a child and he died trying to win time away from labor to play! I've seen them bring bodies of dead men out of mines all my life—but I'd rather sweep the streets, if I were you, or dig ditches, or drive mules down in the dark than just be—well, nothing in particular but somebody's son with money to spend—and not the least bit of sense about spending it."

Wayne Craighill had been scolded, and nagged, and prayed over without effect, but this speech was like a challenge; there was a cry of triumph in it. And her reference to the dead men of the pit, and the morbid scorn of her last phrases set his blood tingling. He was aware now that it was once again and precious time to be near her; no other voice had power to thrill like hers; no other eyes had ever searched his soul with so deep and earnest a questioning.

"If I will labor for you—if I will work with these hands for you"—he held them out in unconscious imitation of her own manner a moment before, looking down at them curiously—"will you take my life, what I can make of it, and go to the end with me—you and I together?"

She shook her head, though with a smile on her lips. "No! That is an impossible thing. And this idea of my helping you—I haven't the least bit of patience with that—not the least. You were born free but you have wasted your freedom; and once you were to labor with your hands—to know the toil of the men down below—you would see things differently, and all beautiful things would mean more to you. You are big and strong and you can be a man if you want to be. But I'm going to do a foolish thing—the most foolish thing I could do, I suppose—I'm going to be friends with you—just as long as you will let it be that; and I'm saying this—I wonder if you know why?"

"You are kind, that is all I need to know."

"I'm not in the least kind—don't misunderstand me. But," she smiled brightly, confidently, "I trust you, and I believe in you; and I like you. If that suits you I'm ready to begin."

She put out her hand with a frank gesture, and her smile won him to instant acquiescence, though there were stipulations he wished to make as to this new relationship. He caught a glimpse of the motor bringing his father and Mrs. Craighill from the station as it flashed past the windows to the carriage entrance. The desire to possess, to protect, to defend this woman set his heart singing. She did not fear him, an evil, abhorred creature, an ugly wreck on the shoals of time; she had spoken to him rather as a man might have done, but his response was to the woman heart in her. His hand trembled in her clasp, and the wholesomeness, the sweetness, the earnestness of her warm nature kindled the hope of life in his heart. He felt a new ease, as of lifted burdens, and a light was round about him, and well for this exalted moment that he could not see ahead into the circling dark.

"Good-bye, Jean!" He bent down and held her hand an instant to his cheek—the hand that had known labor! "Good-bye, Wayne Craighill," she replied, soberly. A moment later he left the house by the front door, followed by his father and Mrs. Craighill, who at the same moment appeared in the side hall. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

In For Either Way. Minister—Now, Tommy, suppose you did something naughty and were asked if you did it. What would you say? Tommy—I dunno. Minister—You don't know? Why—why, what would happen if you told a lie? Tommy—The devil'd git me. Minister—That's right. And what if you told the truth? Tommy—I'd git the devil.—Toledo Blade.

"You carry your age remarkably well," says I. "Well, the moment I said it I could see that I was in the wrong. She was looking chilly and getting red, so I said: "Don't mind my little joke—I never meant what I said. As a matter of fact, you don't carry your age a bit well." "And then she killed me with a haughty look and sailed away without saying good-bye. Say, how should I have put it?"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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He sent for "twelve useful household articles" and got a package of needles. He sent \$1 to find out "how to get rich." The secret was, "Work hard and never spend a cent." He wrote to find out how to write without pen and ink. He was told to use a lead pencil. He paid \$1 to learn how to live without work, and was told on a postal card: "Fish for easy marks, as we do."

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N. & W. Railway Schedule in Effect May 15, 1910.

11 a.m. Lv. Charlotte So. Ry. 5.50 pm. 2.40 pm. Lv. Winston N&W 2.10 pm. 4.44 Lv. Martville N&W Ar. 11.40 am. 7.00 pm. Ar Roanoke N&W Lv. 9.15 am. Additional trains leave Winston-Salem 7.10 a. m. daily except Sunday. Connects at Roanoke for the East and West. Pullman sleepers. Dining cars. If you are thinking of taking a trip YOU want quotations, cheapest fares, reliable and correct information, as to routes, train schedules, the most comfortable and quickest way. Write and the information is yours for the asking, with one of our complete Map Folders. W. B. BEVIL, M. F. BRAGG, Gen. Pass. Agt. Trav. Pass. Agt. Roanoke, Va.

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