

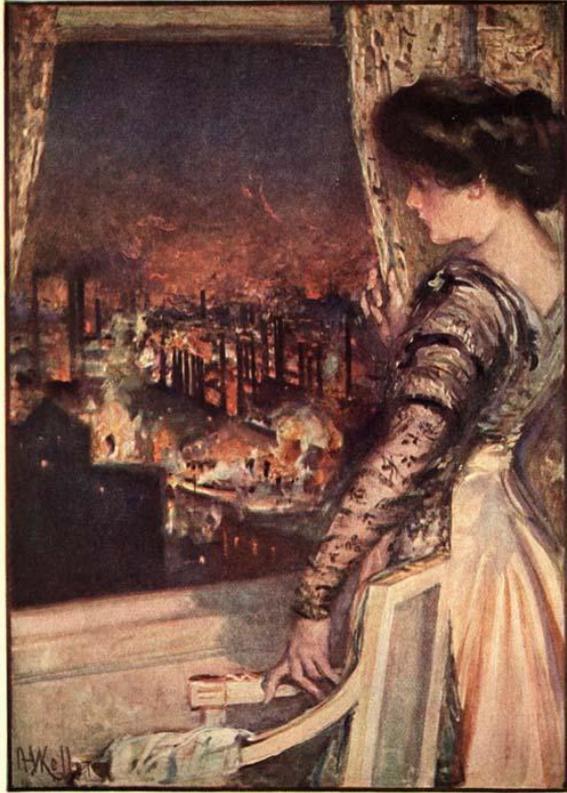
**The**  
**Lords of High Decision**

**By**  
**MEREDITH NICHOLSON**

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**JEAN MORLEY**

TO BOWMAN ELDER AND EDWARD ROBINETTE  
IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR CANOE FLIGHT THROUGH  
THE  
MAINE WOODS, WITH A BACKWARD GLANCE  
AT INDIAN JOE  
WHO FAILED TO FIND THE MOOSE

*Mackinac Island,  
September 20, 1909.*

And the Fourth Kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.

And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken.

*The Book of Daniel.*

# **THE LORDS OF HIGH DECISION**

# CHAPTER I

## THE FACE IN THE LOCKET

AS Mrs. John McCandless Blair entered the house her brother, Wayne Craighill, met her in the hall. The clock on the stair landing was striking seven.

“On time, Fanny? How did it ever happen?” he demanded as she caught his hands and peered into his face. He blinked under her scrutiny; she always gave him this sharp glance when they met,—and its significance was not wasted on him; but she was satisfied and kissed him, and then, as he took her wrap:

“For heaven’s sake what’s up, Wayne? Father was ominously solemn in telephoning me to come over. John’s dining at the Club—I think father wants to see us alone.”

“It rather looks that way, Fanny,” replied Wayne, laughing at his sister’s earnestness.

“Well, is he going to do it at last?”

“There’s no use kicking if he is, so be prepared for the worst.”

“Well, if it’s that Baltimore woman——”

“Or that Philadelphia woman, or the person he met in Berlin—the one from nowhere——”

Their voices had reached Colonel Craighill and he came into the hall and greeted his daughter affectionately.

“Give me credit, papa! I was on time to-night!”

“We will give John credit for sending you. How’s the new car working?”

“Oh, more or less the usual way!”

Dinner was announced and they went out at once, Mrs. Blair taking a place opposite her father at the round table, with Wayne between them.

Roger Craighill was an old citizen; it may be questioned whether he was not, by severe standards, the first citizen of Pittsburg. There were, to be sure, richer men, but his identification with the soberer past of the City of the Iron Heart—before the Greater City had planted its guidons as far as now along the rivers and over the hills—gave indubitable value and dignity to his name. He was interested in many philanthropies and reforms, and he had just returned from Washington where he had attended a conference of the American Reform Federation, of which he was a prominent and influential member. Colonel Craighill, like his son, dressed with care and followed the fashion, and to-night in his evening clothes his daughter thought him unusually handsome and distinguished. He had kept his figure, and his fine colouring had prompted Mr. Richard Wingfield, the cynic of the Allequippa Club, to bestow upon him the soubriquet of Rosy Roger, a pleasantry for which Wingfield had been censured by the governors. But Colonel Craighill’s fine height and his noble head with its crown of white hair, set him apart for admiration in any gathering. He walked a

mile a day and otherwise safeguarded his health, which an eminent New York physician assured him once a year was perfect.

Roger Craighill was by all tests the most eligible widower in western Pennsylvania, and gossip had striven for years to marry him to any one of a dozen women imaginably his equals. When the local possibilities were exhausted attention shifted to women of becoming age and social standing in other cities—New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore—Colonel Craighill's frequent absences from home lending faint colour of truth to these speculations. His daughter, Mrs. John McCandless Blair, had often discussed the matter with her brother, but without resentment, save occasionally when some woman known to them and distasteful or particularly unsuitable from their standpoint was suggested. It was indicative of the difference in character and temperament between brother and sister that Wayne was more captious in his criticisms of the presumptive candidates for their mother's place in the old home than his sister. When, shortly after Mrs. Craighill's death, Wayne's dissolute habits became a town scandal there were many who said that things would have gone differently if his mother had lived; that Mrs. Craighill had understood Wayne, but that his father was wholly out of sympathy with him.

Mrs. John McCandless Blair was immensely aroused now by the suspicion that her father was about to bring home a second wife, and she steeled her heart against the unknown woman. She was not in the least abashed by her father, who never took her seriously. He began describing his visit to Washington, to cover the four courses of the family dinner that must be eaten before—with proper deliberation and the room freed of the waitress—he apprised his children of the particular purpose of this family gathering.

Colonel Craighill was a capital talker and he gave an intimate turn to his account of the Washington meeting, uttering the names of his distinguished associates in the Federation with frank pride in their acquaintance. A Southern bishop, far-famed as a story-teller, was a member and Colonel Craighill repeated several anecdotes with which the clergyman had enlivened the conferences. He quoted one or two periods from his own speech at the dinner, and paused for Mrs. Blair and Wayne to admire their aptness. With a nice sense of climax he mentioned last his invitation to luncheon at the White House, where there was only one other guest—a famous English statesman and man of letters.

“It was really quite *en famille*. My impression of the President was delightful; I confess that I had wholly misjudged him. He addressed many questions to me directly—asking about political conditions here at home in such a way that I had to do a good deal of talking. As I was leaving he detained me a moment and asked my opinion of the business outlook. I was amazed to see how familiar he appeared to be with the range of my own interests. He told me that if I had suggestions at any time as to financial policies he wished I would come down and talk to him personally. But the published reports of my visit to the White House annoyed me greatly. I thought it only just to myself to write him a line to repudiate the interview attributed to me. There have, of course, been rumours of cabinet changes, but I don’t want office—all I ask is to be of some service to my fellow-men in the rôle of a private citizen.”

Mrs. Blair murmured sympathetic responses through this recital. Wayne ate his salad in silence. He knew that his father enjoyed nothing so much as these conferences in behalf of good causes; they required a great deal of time, but Colonel Craighill had

reached an age at which he could afford to indulge himself. If he enjoyed delivering addresses and making after-dinner speeches it was none of Wayne's affair. Their natures were antipodal. Wayne cared little what his father did, one way or another.

Mrs. Blair fell to chaffing her father about the work of the Federation. Her curiosity as to the nature of the announcement he had said he wished to make grew more acute as the minutes passed, and she talked with rather more than her usual nervous volubility.

"Just think," she exclaimed, "of drinking champagne over the building of schools for poor negroes! If you would send them the champagne how much more sensible it would be! There's a beautiful idea. Why not found a society for providing free champagne for the poor and needy!"

"It's not for you to deride, Fanny. Only a little while ago you were raising a fund for the restoration of a Buddhist temple somewhere in darkest Japan—the merest fad. I remember that Doctor McAllister wrote me a letter expressing surprise that a daughter of mine should be aiding a heathen enterprise."

"It *was* too bad, papa! But the temple is all restored now, and we had a little fund left over after the work was done—I was treasurer and didn't know what else to do with it—so I gave it to help build an Episcopal parish house at Ironstead. And to-day I was out there in the machine and behold! Jimmy Paddock is running that parish house and a mission and is no end of a power in the place."

"Paddock? What Paddock?" asked Wayne.

“Why, Jimmy Paddock. Don’t you remember him? You knew him in your prep. school, and he was on the eleven at Harvard while you were at the ‘Tech.’”

“Not the same man,” declared Wayne. “I knew my Jimmy like a top; he was no monk—not by a long shot. Besides, his family had money to burn. No parish house larks for Jim. He knew how to order a dinner!”

“It just happens,” replied Mrs. Blair, “that I knew Jimmy, too, back in your college days and I declare that I saw him this afternoon at Ironstead. I was out there looking for a maid who used to work for us and I met Jimmy Paddock in the street—a very disagreeable street it was, too. You know he was always shy and he seemed terribly embarrassed. It was hard work getting anything out of him; but he’s our old Jimmy and he’s a regular minister—went off and did it all by himself and has been out there at Ironstead for six months—all through the hot weather.”

“Does he wear a becoming habit and hold quiet days for women?” asked Wayne. “I remember that you affected the Episcopalians for a while—for about half of one Lent! That was just before those table-tippers buncoed you into introducing them to our first families.”

“That is unworthy of you, Wayne!” and Mrs. Blair frowned at her brother with mock indignation. “Nobody ever really explained some of the things those mediums did. They certainly told *me* things——!”

“I’ll wager they did,” laughed Wayne. “But go on about Jimmy.”

“He’s just a plain little minister—no habit or anything like that. He’s wonderful with men and boys. He thanked me for helping with the parish house, and when candour compelled me to tell him that I didn’t know it was his enterprise and that he had got what was left after restoring a Buddhist temple, he smiled in just his old boyish way, and I made him get in the machine and take me to see the place, which is the simplest. There was a sign on the door of the parish house that said, ‘Boxing Lessons Tuesday Night, by a Competent Instructor. All Welcome.’ And it was signed ‘J. Paddock, Rector.’”

“If this minister is the boy we knew when Wayne was at St. John’s I should think he would have come to see us,” remarked Colonel Craighill. “We used to meet his family now and then.”

“I scolded him for not telling us he’s here; and he said he had been too busy. He asked all about you, Wayne—said he was going to look you up; but when I asked him to come and dine with us he was so unhappy in trying to get out of it that I told him not to bother. He’s perfectly devoted to his work, and they say the people out there are crazy about him.”

“Dear old Jimmy!” mused Wayne. “I wonder how he’s kept it so dark. You never can tell! Jimmy used to exhaust his chapel cuts the first week every term. If he’s taken to saving souls, though, he’ll do it; he hangs on like a bull pup. I can see him now at that last Thanksgiving game going down the field with the ball under his arm—he was as fast as lightning. I’d like to take a few boxing lessons from Jimmy myself, if he’s in the business.”

Coffee was served; Mrs. Blair dropped the Reverend James Paddock and watched her father choose his single lump of sugar.

He refused a cigar but waited until Wayne had lighted a cigarette before he dismissed the waitress and began.

“It must have occurred to you both that I might at some time marry again.”

“Yes, father; I suppose that possibility has occurred to many people,” replied his daughter, feeling that something was required at once. Wayne said nothing, but drew his chair back from the table and crossed his legs.

“I want you to understand that your dead mother’s life is a precious—a very precious memory. My determination to marry means no disloyalty to her.”

He bowed his head and drew one hand lightly across the table.

“I have been lonely at times; the management of the house in itself has been a burden, but I have not liked to give it up. I might have gone to live with you, Fanny,—you and John have been kind in urging me—but you have your own family; and as long as Wayne is unmarried the old place must be his home. The change I propose making will have no effect on your status in my house, Wayne—none whatever!”

“Thank you; I appreciate that, sir.”

“In fact,” continued Colonel Craighill, addressing his son, “you both understand that the house is really yours—I have only a life tenancy here—that was your mother’s wish and she so made her will. Maybe you don’t remember that this property was never mine. Your mother inherited a large tract of land up here from her father, and after I built the house the title remained in her name—the

homestead will be yours, Wayne; your mother made it up to Fanny in other ways.”

“I understand—but wouldn’t it be better for me to leave—for a time at least—after your marriage?”

“No; I couldn’t think of that, and I’m sure Adelaide would be very uncomfortable if she felt you were being driven from home. And, moreover, you know how prone people are to gossip. It must not be said that my son left his father’s house through any act of mine.”

“The old story of the cruel stepmother!” smiled Wayne; but his father went on gravely, as though to rebuke this levity.

“There are ways in which you have been a great grief to me; I had not meant to speak of that, but Fanny has been a good sister to you and she knows the whole story. I should like you to remember—to remember that you are my son!”

Wayne nodded, but did not speak. After a moment his father resumed, addressing them both.

“I have known the lady I am to marry a comparatively short time, but I have become deeply attached to her. She is young, but that is not her fault”—and Colonel Craighill smiled—“or mine! Her father died when she was still a child, and she has lived abroad with her mother much of the time. She is of an old Vermont family. The marriage is to take place in a fortnight and by our own wish will be altogether simple and quiet. Please do not mention this; I have to go to Cleveland to-morrow for a day or two and I shall make the announcement when I return. I have thought to save your feelings and to prevent embarrassment all round by not asking

either of you to the ceremony. We shall meet in New York and go quietly to Doctor McAllister's residence—he is an old friend whom I have known long in church affairs—and we shall come home immediately. The name of the lady is Allen—Miss Adelaide Allen. I am sure you will learn to like her—that you and Fanny will see and appreciate the fine qualities in Miss Allen that have won my admiration and affection.”

There was a moment's silence when he concluded. The candle nearest him sputtered and he adjusted it carefully. Then Mrs. Blair rose and kissed him.

“You sly old daddy!” she broke out; “and you never told a soul! Well”—and she seated herself again at the table and nibbled a bonbon—“tell us what she's like, and her ways and her manners. I suppose, of course, she's a teacher in one of your negro schools, or a foreign missionary or something noble like that! Tell us everything—everything——” and Mrs. Blair, elbows on table, denoted the breadth of her demand by an outward sweep of her hands from the wrists.

Colonel Craighill smiled indulgently in the enjoyment of his daughter's eagerness.

“Tell us everything—her just being from Vermont doesn't mean much. Is she a blonde?”

“Well,” replied Colonel Craighill, colouring slightly, “Now that I think of it, I believe she is!”

“I knew it!” exclaimed Mrs. Blair; “they're always blondes! What are her eyes?”

“Blue.”

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