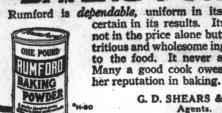
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CHAPTER XXIV. As she spoke, she looked up and down the mantel-shelf, as if she were searching for something.

"I put a long pin-a hat-pin-there," she said.

Mechanically he searched also, pushing aside the curios and ornaments. shrink from me. Don't-don't look so, In doing so, he took up the portrait, or I shall go mad. She is a bad, worthlying face downward, and was putting less woman. I left her. I have not seen it down again, when, as mechanically, her for years. She is nothing to me; he lganced at it.

bewitching face in the silver frame, as ago. Ah, that you understand. Come if he had suddenly fallen under a spell. to me. Child, have pity!" Gradually a deathly pallor spread over his face, his eyes became distended.

turned to leave the room. She came bear-the truth. back to him and looked over his shoul-

"That portrait? Whose is it?" asked.

She had not seen his face. His senses seemed to be deserting him; he could not remove his eyes why-why did you not tell me? Your from the face, which, with its "beauty | wife!" of the devil," seemed to smile up at him mockingly, derisively. His silence smote her, and she looked at him. A

low cry broke from her lips. "What-what is the matter?" murmured. "What-is it? I-I found it, saw it. Whose portrait is it?"

Though he tried to crush the answer control of his voice. "It is my wife," he said, as

speaks in his sleep. She shrunk back from him as if he had struck her.

"Your-wife?" The words were scarcely audible, wife!"

it come there? What juggling fiend not torture me. Sit down!" had conjured the thing up to confront

him with it at this moment—the mo-"Your-wife?" Decima repeated, and she shrunk a step further away from ly, her face upraised, her eyes fixed on

"My wife!" he said, hoarsely, still drove him mad. staring at it. Then he lifted his eyes looked and realized that he had spoken aloud, that he had told her.

With an oath he flung the portrait into the fire-place. It fell with a crash way. I will go in and wait until he as the glass and frame were shattered on the tiles; then he stretched out his hands toward her.

"Yes, my wife. Decima, you know now why I can not marry you. I am. fiendish trick on him. married already.

"No-no!" she put up her hands to ber ears as if to shut out the words. "It is true!" he said, hoarsely, with a calm more terrible than any violence. "I am married to-that woman whose portrait lies there. That-is why

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I can not marry you. Listen-for God's sake, don't shrink from me!" for as

"Your wife! Then-then it is not I you love—you can not! It is she!" oitterness. "You don't know what you

say. Love? I hate, I loathe her!" A cry broke from her lips. "But she is your wife."

He made a gesture of despair. How could he tell her, make her understand?

"Decima, she is my wife, but I hate her! No man with a spark of manhood could do otherwise. Child, listen-don't nothing-nothing. Don't you under-He did not start, uttered no cry, but stand? But that she is my wife I should

He knelt to her, and drew her hands from her face. She yielded, or rather, "Who-what?" broke from his set she did not resist, but her eyes were fixed vacantly above his head, as if Decima had found the pin, and had she were trying to understand—and to I pray you remember your own youth

"Decima, now that you know, you will not turn from me?"

"Your wife!" She drew one hand from his grasp and pressed it against her forehead with a piteous little gesture of helplessness, and despair. "Oh,

"My God! don't repeat it!" he cried "Try-try and forget it. Decima, you -you will not desert me; you will not draw back? I can not live without you! If you turn from me-"

He rose and caught her in his arms for she had swayed to and fro, as if she were about to fall. But his touch down, it would come, as if he had lost seemed to give her strength to resist him, and after a moment-a moment man during which he looked into her eyesshe recovered from the terrible faintness and drew herself from his arms.

"Let-let me go! ah, let me go!" she panted. "I will go! I want to go! Your Mr. Thorpe.

"You shall not go until you have heard me!" he said, fiercely. "Child, He still gazed at the face. How had you don't understand, or you would 'No. no!

> "Ah, but you must! You must listen. Decima--She stood, her hands clasped tight-

vacancy; and her despair almost "Decima," he began again; then sud-

heavily, slowly, and looked at her, denly he stopped. There was a sound in the corridor. A voice, a woman's voice, said in clear, metallic tones: "Thanks; don't trouble. I know the

> comes in." At the sound of the voice Gaunt started and looked over his shoulder,

as if his senses were playing some Decima heard the voice, the words

but she did not move. "God! it is she!" broke white lips.

He caught Decima's arm, but stood as if paralyzed for a moment, then he said in a hoarse whisper:

"Go-that room!" and dashing open closed the door and stood with his to play." back to it and-waited!

CHAPTER XXV. It was the long arm of Coincidence -guided by Morgan Thorpe's cunning

-which had led Laura to Prince's

Mansions that night of all nights. Three days before there had been a of menu and cozy in character, and, as lies before her." usual. Trevor and Bobby were the only guests.

Now, Bobby had come back from Leafmore with a good resolution. We would see no more of Morgan Thorpe and Luara-for, alas! it was as "Laura" he had habitually thought of her, and not seldom addressed her, so road to the infernal regions, which is constructed of good resolutions, must be the most endurable ever imagined, more endurable than stone more slippery than asphalt!—and he meant to stick to it. But the morning after his resolve, behold! Mr. Morgan Thorpe, arrayed in faultless attire, entered Gaunt's rooms, and greeted Bobby as if he were a long-lost brother

suddenly returned. "My dear boy," he exclaimed "where have you been? I called the other night, and was filled with alarm when

hey told me that you had left London feared that you had fled from us for ood," which, though he did not intend, was a particularly accurate way of putting it. "I was quite cut up, I assure you, and as to Laura-" He paused and smiled at Bobby. "Well, perhaps I'd better not say how my news affected her. Mustn't tell tales out of chool, eh, Deane?"

He leaned forward and touched Bobby on the knee, and Bobby grew red

"I-I had a wire from home, and had to run down suddenly." Morgan Thorpe glanced at him

"No bad news, I trust?" he said. "N-o," replied Bobby, after a moent's hesitation. "At least—well, something had gone wrong—some usiness; but it's all right now."

"I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid one of your people was ill," said Mr. Morgan Thorpe, with charming symhe had taken a step toward her she pathy. "And I'm glad you are back. had drawn back with a gesture of We missed you, my dear Deane, though you were away for so short a time. Trevor came and dined with us, butwell, Trevor is a deuced good fellow, "Love her?" He laughed with fierce but he didn't compensate us for your absence. I never saw Laura so triste and dull. You really must come round soon. What do you say to dining with

us to-morrow night?" Bobby's good resolution rose and looked at him sternly, and, still more red and uncomfortable, he stammered an excuse.

"Engaged! I'm sorry, and I'm sure Laura will be. Well, we'll hope for another night. What are you going to do this afternoon? Drop in at the club and have a quiet shell out with Tervor and me.'

What could Bobby say? It would have been extremely difficult for him he stood stock still and stared at the have told you of my love long, long to remark: "Look here, Thorpe, I've made a mental vow to cut you, therefore—get out!" What young man of Bobby's age and temperament could have done that? Oh, parents and guardians, when you are inclined to be hard on your erring sons and wards, and the temptations thereof!

"All right," he said; but there was another pause of hesitation, which, be sure, did not escape the wily tempter's

"Half a moment," said Bobby, as his visitor rose to leave. "I'll—I'll take up those I.O.U.'s, Thorpe, I've got some oof. He went to the bureau of inlaid satin-wood and took out his checkbook; but Morgan Thorpe waved his hand with delighted indifference.

"No need to bother about that just now, my dear Deane," he said. "Besides, I haven't the I.O.U.'s with me." They were in his pocket at that moment, of course. "And dashed if I remember what I did with them. They're at home somewhere, I dare say. Bring the check next time you come and dine with us."

Again, what could Bobby do? He could scarcely force the check upon

"All right," he said again. "Butbut, Thorpe, I wanted to tell you-" He colored again, but the old Bobby asserted itself, and he looked Thorpe in the face squarely, and as he did so, which was singularly like that of Decima's

"What is it, my dear boy?" "What is it, my dear boy?"
"Oh, only this; that I've made up
my mind to cut cards for the future.
The fact is—well, my governor has lost some money, and I can't afford-" Morgan Thorpe seized his hand.

"My dear Deane, I'm delighted to hear you say that-not, that your father has lost money, but that you are going to cut cards. It's strange, but I was just going to ask you if you'd mind my giving you a word of advice, of warning. I was going to ask if you'd drop gambling. I was indeed! It was on the tip of my tongue. To tell you the truth. Laura and I have been—now, you won't mind, you won't think us intrusive and impertinent, I hope,

"No, no," said Bobby. "Gon on." -"Well, we've been thinking about you-she is always ready to talk about you, you know. You must know that the door, half led, half dragged her she-well, takes a great interest in into the adjoining room. Then he you, and she begged me to ask you not

Bobby felt so grateful, so touched by the beautiful woman's goodness and care for him that he could not speak. "And I promised her that I would If I had not done so, she would have spoken to you herself. I'm convinced she would. Ah, I assure you, the dear girl has plenty of pluck when she has little dinner at Cardigan Terrace. It resolved upon doing the right thing. was like all the other dinners, perfect when she is convinced that a duty

(To be continued.)

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