

CRAMPS-COLIC-

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eated, hoarsely. His own voice sound-

wave of fire, and swept over him,

for his face, his voice frightened her.

He turned from her and walked to

"Then-then why-" He stopped as

She stood downcast and trembling

"He-he helped us. We should have

"My God!" broke from his strained

lips. "Child!"-he caught her in an

iron grip-"do you know-realize-

what it is you are doing? Marry Mer-

His grasp hurt her; but she made no

"Why-why are you so angry with

from him without- He would not

His grasp tightened and she winc-

stretched and strained on a rack. And

She looked up at him, at his set face

"Why-why are you so angry; why

A shudder ran through him, and the

set rigidity of his face relaxed melted,

"Mr. God, child, don't you know?"

"Is it because you-you like me, be-

"Go on! Speak from your heart;

would have married me," she said,

A groan broke from his white lips.

"Child!" he said in a slow, thick

roice, "don't you know? Haven't you

seen? Can you not guess? I love you!

startled and awed her.

"You love-"

you, fled from you!"

She shrunk-for even in him passion

"I love you!" His voice broke on

have loved you from the beginning. No

man ever loved any woman as I love

you. You are the life of my life, the soul of my soul. Every thought is of

you. You hold my heart in the hollow of your hands. It was because I loved

you passionately, madly, that I left

be torn from him there and then.

Decima stood quite still. She did not hrink from him; she was too over-

whelmed by the storm of his passion

to realize the meaning of his words.

Then slowly it came crushing down upon her, caught her as if in an em-

brace, enveloped her like a sun-warm-

Her heart leaped, then beat heavily;

a joy beyond the power of poor mortal

All in an instant a veil seemed to

could have laughed aloud in her new-

words to limn, suffused her.

the man increased the torture.

terror.

so to speak.

he said, hoarsely.

ed, insisted, hoarsely,

nearer to him.

attempt to release her arm as she look-

the end of the room. Then he came

inaudibly

going to marry him?"

She looked up at him

wonder in her sad eyes.

"Yes," she said, almost

"Do-do you love him?"

warker, fiercer.

res, or no?"

swering to it.

shon! You!"

"No," her lips formed

He drew a long breath.

if the words choked him.

een penniless-Bobby-"

He saw it all in an instant.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

"He has lost a great deal of money, and at first we thought, we feared that But it does not matter now. Her voice was very still and subdued. "It is all over now, all put straight."

"Why did you not tell me?" he began, almost fiercely. Then he stopped as she looked at him with faint sur-

"I would have told you," she said, simply, not reproachfully, "but I did not know where you were-no one

"No; that is true. Forgive me!" he said, almost inaudibly. She had been in trouble, and in need of him, and had not been able to come to him! What a brute he had been!

"And you would have come to me?"

he said, rather huskily. "Yes," she said, simply, but a little timidly. "There was no one else, and -and you are always so kind. You would have told me what to do, advis-

ed me, would you not?" "Yes." he said, still more huskily, ed up at him piteously and with faint

"I would; God knows how gladly!" surprise. "Thank you," she said, and the sweetness of her voice hurt him. "But me?" she faltered. "How could I help it does not matter now; it is all over." it? He said that if-if I married him "I am glad," he said, "and yet sorry, he would pay this money, and-and

that—that I hadn't a hand in getting help Bobby. And—and I said 'Yes,' at rid of the trouble. Are you sure that last. I could not have taken this money it is past-done with?"

"Yes, quite," she said in the same have given it. And—and it does not still voice. She put her hand up be- matter what becomes of me so that fore her face as if the fire were burn- they are safe and-and happy." ing it. He rose and took a Japanese screen from the mantel-shelf-his ed; but he was all unconscious of the hand touched the portrait lying face pain he was inflicting. His own agony downward-and gave it to her; and was too great. The thought that she with a murmured thanks, she took it was to be the wife of another manand screened her face. Relentless and that man Mershon!-was rending Time again broke the silence with his heart in twain; every nerve was sweeping scythe.

"How did your father come to lose her admission that she did not love this money?" asked Gaunt.

Decima turned her face as if her thoughts had been wandering from and gleaming eyes, with a questioning the subject.

"I don't quite know. It was through some speculation—something to do do you care so?" she faltered. with one of his inventions. Mr. Mer-

"Mershon!" Gaunt started and looked at her earnestly. "Was he in it? How did he-ah, I remember! And your father lost his money? I can well believe it! I don't know much of Mr. Mershon, but I should say-"

"Oh, hush!" she broke in, looking up at him as if she dreaded the next "Perhaps-" words. "You-you must not say-I must not listen to-to anything against tle smile.

with a frown. "Why not?" he said-demanded,

rather. The color rose to her face, then

left it pale again. She raised her eyes simply. "I-I think you like me, Lord to his with a world of sad resignation Gaunt, And I could not have taken the "I know now! Oh, how could I!" "I am going to be his wife," she said wife, could I?"

in a low voice.

but sat like one suddenly turned to fled from Temptation, but Temptation stone. Then his face broke up, as it is fleet of feet, and it had overtaken were, and he rose and stood before her. him and had got him under its heel. "Going-to-be-his wife!" he re-

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orn joy, delight. But all she did was to gaze up at him as the devotee gazes upward at his god, the god which had power to deal out misery or joy un

Her voice thrilled through him, and lispelled the last remnant of hono that clung to him despairingly.

"I love you!" he said. "You are just life to me! Decima, if you had not been as innocent as a child, you would have known it! Think, look back! Do you remember nothing? have you seen nothing? Why was I always with youwhy did I stay at Leafmore-why did I do all, everything you wanted? Do ed like a muffled. His own voice soundmen act like that unless they are in round with him. His love for her, his love? See!" He thrust his hand in his jealousy, rose about him like a great bosom and dragged out the ribbon which had fallen from her hair. " scorching him as it passed. "You are have worn this next my heart day and night. Sleeping or walking, it has never left me. You had worn it."

The blood rushed to her face, her eyes glowed with a pure passion, and she drew still nearer to him. His arm went round her waist, and

he crushed her against his heart, and back and stood over her, a tall figure for the last time-the first time!-his almost threatening in its aspect. lips sought hers and kissed her. She did not shrink, but lay in his She was silent, and his face grew embrace, her face upturned, flower-

like, to his kisses. "Answer me. You can answer me. "You are the whole wide world to me!" he said, hoarsely. "Life is not She rose, drawn to her feet by the worth having without you. I can not tress of his emotion and hers, anlive without you. I thought I could. I have tried-but you see, you know-l can not! Decima, child, my dearest,

> tell me! Tell me! Do you love me?" She looked up at him, and the look sent a hot wave over him. Her lips parted, but for a moment no words would come. Then she said, in a faint whisner which thrilled him:

"I love you!" "Decima!"

She hid her face against his heart for a moment, then she raised her eves to his.

"Yes: I know now! How-how stupid-how ignorant I was! I-I must have loved you all through-from the very first!'

He bent and kissed her hair passionately yet reverently. Her avowal of love awed him. It was as if he had suddenly penetrated the sanctum sanctorum, the holy of holies of some shrine. Her innocence cried aloud to

But his passion deafened him. "Decima, since the day we met at Leafmore, I have loved you. Day by day that love has grown until it has become the master-passion of my life. I have struggled with and fought against it, but Fate and circumstances have been too many for me. You know the truth now, and-and I am no

"Sorry! Why should you be?" she said: and love lent a sweeter music to her voice, so that he paused and listened before replying.

"I am not sorry! For us nothing matters, nothing is of consequence but our love. Nothing, no none, shall separate us. Decima!'

She smiled up at him, and her han stole to his face with a womanly touc which thrilled him

"No!" she said. Then she started "But-but Mr. Mershon! I have given In her innocence she drew a little my word-my promise!" Her fac grew grave and fearful. Gaunt laughed slowly-a laugh of scorn and de cause we have been such friends that flance.

"A word wrung from you-cozened you are so sorry for me?" she said, by an artful scheme!" he said. "What does it amount to? He-he bought She stopped and smiled, a woeful litbribed you! Bah! I buy, bribe you! I'll do all he offered." He laughed, and Gaunt stopped and stared at her hide nothing from me!" he command- pressed her to him. "And I buy with love, love! My child, do you know "Perhaps if I had come to you and now what you were about to do-to and told you of our trouble you marry a man you did not love?"

"Yes," she said, and a shudder shook her, so that she clung tighter to him

money unless—unless I had been your "How could you!" he exclaimed with a desperate, reckless laugh. "But that is all over, finished with, dearest. Gaunt did not move for a moment, Fate was too many for him. He had It is I-I-I whom you love! Are you glad, Decima? Tell me!" (To be continued.)

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All in an instant a veil seemed to have been torn asunder, and she saw and knew what love meant; and that her love, with all it meant, had been given to him long, long ago. The pain of his grasp became an ecstasy. She could have larghed aloud in her new-

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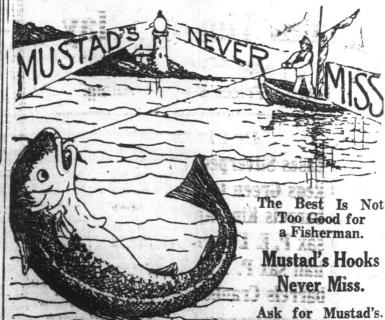
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