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## The Lapse of Enoch Wentworth

ISABEL GORDON CURTIS

Author of "The Woman  
from Wolvertons"

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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"Then what did you do?" Enoch's  
face was full of hatred and defiance.  
His eyes flamed with the tumult of an  
animal at bay.

"There was only one thing to do,"  
Zilla Paget lay back in the chair and  
smoothed the chinchilla of her muff  
caressingly. "Of course I brought it  
away with me, every scrap of it. You  
would not have let such a valuable  
asset into the hands of a dustman,  
would you? There are only two pages  
missing. Do you care to see it?"

"Damn you, no! I have no wish to  
see it," snarled Wentworth.

"Any fool can tell at a glance it is  
a first draft. Merry must have written  
like mad. There is hardly a change  
in it. Except for my own role, every  
line stands almost as it was written."  
Enoch suddenly leaned forward in  
his chair. "You think you've got the  
strangle hold on me?"

Miss Paget laughed triumphantly.  
"The strangle hold! You Americans  
have such jolly strong words! That's  
great—the strangle hold."

She rose and folded the pages of  
manuscript, put them in her bag, then  
she drew off her coat and hung it on

the chair behind her. She lifted a  
gold case from the pocket, picked out  
a cigarette, and scratching a match  
lit it, blowing a delicate ring of smoke  
across the room. It flitted into Went-  
worth's face.

"I always knew," she bent over to  
drop a flock of ashes on a tray be-  
side her, "or rather I have guessed for  
a long time, that you did not write  
'The House of Esterbrook.'"

"What gave you that impression?"  
"For one thing, everybody tells how  
you and Merry were friends once—  
Castor and Pollux sort of guys, don't  
you know. You hate each other now.  
An owl could see that with its eyes  
shut."

"If you ever left the stage you could  
make big money in the detective busi-  
ness," Enoch laughed harshly.

"Perhaps," she conceded. "Then I  
have rehearsed too many plays not to  
know the author when I bump into  
him. I knew months ago that Merry  
wrote 'The House,' but I could not  
prove it. You haven't got it in you to  
do that sort of work."

"Thank you," Enoch laughed un-  
steadily.

"Here's the whole situation. If Miss  
Wentworth and you do not fancy hav-  
ing me here as a guest, no better  
word than that occurs to me now.  
Grant Oswald might be interested; at  
least he might insist on paying the  
royalties to the author. Or, I could  
get a fancy price for the story from a  
New York paper. I am told they pay  
tremendously on this side for a rip-  
pling sensation. This would make one,  
don't you say so yourself?"

"My God!" Enoch stared at her  
with desperate eyes.

Miss Paget rose, unplanned her hat  
and tossed it upon the table. She  
stood surveying Wentworth with a  
gleam of amusement in her eyes. Then  
she crossed the room and leaned out  
at the window. "Hi, there, Cabby,"  
she called, "wake up. Bring in the  
rest of that luggage."

### CHAPTER XIX.

A Break in the Waverly Place Home.  
"There is another bit of baggage,"  
Dorcas spoke to the cabman, who  
stood beside a carriage in front of the  
Waverly Place house. He lifted lit-  
tle Robin and set him on a seat with  
a grip beside him. Dorcas paused with  
her hand on the carriage door.

"Wait," she ordered, as the man  
turned to go in the house; "here  
comes Jason with a valise."

The cabman lifted it from the hands  
of the old negro and swung it up on  
the front seat.

"Jason," said the girl, beckoning to  
him as she ran up the steps of the  
house. The servant followed her. They  
stood under the dull gleam of a lamp  
in the vestibule. She laid her fingers  
on the knob of the inside door and held  
it as one does when in fear of an in-  
truder. "Jason," she repeated, "I  
want to talk with you for a minute."

"Yes, Missy." There was a tremor  
in the old negro's voice.

Dorcas stood gazing at him steadily,  
although a quiver in her chin belied  
the bravery.

"Jason, don't ask me again to take  
you with me," she pleaded. "If you do  
I shall weaken. I do not know where  
I am going myself. I have nowhere  
to take you. I shall miss you terribly,  
you understand that. But you must  
stay here and look after Enoch and  
the house and everything. You are  
needed here as you never were in your  
life before."

"Fo' de Lawd sake, take me wid yo',  
Missy. I'll sleep anywhar. A corner  
in a collar 'll do fo' me."

"Uncle Jason, do you remember the  
story you have told about mother  
leaving you to care for Enoch and  
me? Sometimes I think of that day.  
You wheeled mother out on the piazza  
where the locust trees were in bloom,  
and I almost believe that you did not  
tell me, but that I remember it my-  
self."

"Yes, honey." The tears rolled down  
the negro's wrinkled face. "She called  
to Lucy to bring yo' out. Yo' wan't  
nuffin but er little pink face en two  
doubled-up fists dat wan't ez big ez a  
cotton blossom."

The old man paused to wipe his  
eyes with a red bandanna handker-  
chief.

"And she said?" continued Dorcas.

The girl was trying to smile.

"She said, 'Promise me, Jason, ez  
long ez yo' lives, to care fo' my baby,  
my sweet little gal baby, she'll never  
remember she saw her mother. Take  
care ob her, Jason, ez if de Lawd him-  
self had gib her in yo' charge.' I  
promised, honey," the husky voice  
died away in a sob; "I called de Lawd  
to witness right thar dat I'd look out  
fo' yo' all my life, ez well ez an ol'  
darky could do."

"You have done it, Uncle Jason."

Dorcas took the sooty hand between  
her palms. "If mother could know  
how faithfully you have filled your  
promise—and somehow I feel, Uncle  
Jason, that she does know—she would  
say that you have the whitest soul God  
ever put into a black body."

"Oh Lawdy, Missy, can't I come wid  
yo'? I don't need no money. Yo'  
needn't pay fo' me anywhar—"

"Jason, you blessed old saint, it isn't  
money I am considering. I have plenty  
of money. Mother left Enoch in your  
care as much as she did me. You  
have told me that."

The negro bowed his head solemnly.

"Won't you stay with him?"

Jason pointed to the inner door of  
the vestibule. "Honey, what's a-goin'  
to happen? Do yo' reckon dat Marse  
Enoch's a-goin' to marry dat—pus-  
son?"

"Jason, I don't know. Only you  
must stay here."

"I will." The old servant spoke

in darkness when he tapped at the  
door.

Andrew seated himself in a shadowy  
corner beside the window. A glimmer  
of light from a street lamp fell upon  
the girl's face. In her eyes was an  
appealing loneliness which he had  
never seen before.

"Miss Dorcas," he began with grave  
gentleness, "what can I do for you?  
You know me fairly well. There is  
nothing heroic about me. I doubt if  
I could fight a duel. It makes me  
shiver even to touch a pistol—but I  
am ready to stand up to be shot at if  
it will make things easier for you."

"I believe you would," said Dorcas  
with an unsteady laugh.

"I swear I would," he assured her  
with simple gravity. The girl felt  
deeply moved.

"There will not be any shooting, and  
I don't know exactly what you can do  
for me. I don't even know what to  
ask you to do. I thought of turning to  
Mr. Oswald at first. I didn't. I felt  
I could come to you more easily."

"Thank you for saying that." An  
eager happiness flushed into the man's  
face which seemed to warm each fea-  
ture beneath the surface.

Dorcas stood before him trembling  
and irresolute. "It is so hard—loving  
my brother as I do—to sit in judgment  
on him or to discuss him, even with  
you. You love Enoch, or rather—you  
did once?" she asked quickly.

Merry nodded.

"Since things went wrong between  
you," Dorcas hesitated for a moment.  
"Since that time he has changed; you  
cannot realize how he has changed.  
Still, we were together and alone, and  
I kept thinking that the old happy  
days would come back."

She stopped short and Merry's  
brows wrinkled into lines of perplex-  
ity. "What has happened? What can  
I do to help you?"

"Yesterday," she began hurriedly,  
"when I went home after the matinee,  
Jason stood waiting in the vestibule  
for me. He did not say a word, but  
I knew that something had happened.  
I pushed him aside and ran upstairs.  
I could think of nothing but that  
Enoch had been taken ill. As I passed  
the hall rack I noticed the queer um-  
brella Miss Paget carries. It has a  
tiger's head for a handle—you remem-  
ber it? Even in my anxiety I thought  
how strange it should be there. When  
I reached the library she sat beside  
the fire, reading a magazine."

"Where was Enoch?"

"In his little study, with the door  
locked. He came out when she began  
to talk to me."

"What did she want?"

"Andrew," the tears sprang to the  
girl's eyes, "that woman has come to  
live in our home."

"To live—in your—home!" Merry's  
voice had an incredulous tone in  
it. "Enoch has not—married Zilla  
Paget?"

"I do not know. I cannot under-  
stand. I think that Enoch hates her."

"Then why is she there?"

"I do not know."

"He didn't explain?"

"No. He looked like a thunder-  
cloud. She talked. She said she had  
come to live in our house. Her clothes  
were unpacked. She has taken the  
spare room. Her things, a lorgnette,  
and a scarf and gloves were scattered  
about the library."

"Enoch must be—insane!"

"Oh!" cried Dorcas. "Sudden horror  
flashed into her face. 'Oh! you don't  
think—that?'"

"No. I'm a beast to have frightened  
you. It is not that. Enoch is as sane  
as you are."

(To Be Continued.)

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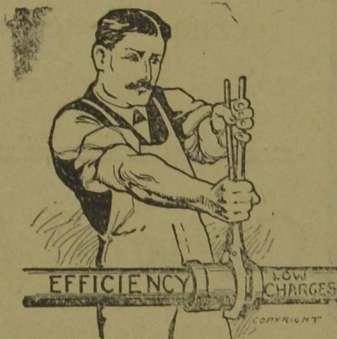
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