

The LAPSE of ENOCH WENTWORTH

By ISABEL GORDON CURTIS Author of "The Woman from Wolverton" ILLUSTRATIONS by ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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SYNOPSIS.

Enoch Wentworth, journalist, and Andrew Merry, actor, play a hand at poker, the stakes absolute control of the future of the loser. Wentworth wins. They decide to keep the matter secret. Dorcas, knowing from her brother, Enoch, of Merry's shortcomings, tries to arouse his ambition. Andrew outlines the plot of a play he has had in mind and she urges him to go to work on it. When the play is completed Merry reads it to Wentworth, whose life ambition is to write a successful play. He demands Merry's play as a forfeit of the bond won in the poker game. Preparations for staging the play are begun, but Merry, who is to take the leading part, is missing. Dorcas proves a success in the leading female part at rehearsals. She quarrels with her brother for taking credit for a play she knows to belong to Merry. Dorcas finds Merry among the down-and-outs in a bread line and persuades him to take his part in the play. The producer suggests certain changes in the play, which Wentworth tries to induce Merry to make. The actor refuses, but finally consents on condition that Wentworth cease his attentions to Zilla Paget, the heavy woman in the play, who has a bad reputation. The play proves a great success. Dorcas accuses her brother of theft. The blind child of Zilla Paget appears and is heartily repudiated by the mother. Zilla Paget finds evidence that Wentworth is not the author of the play and forces herself in as a member of the Wentworth household.

CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

"A wave of scarlet swept over Enoch's face. "To think of Merry squaring up through you. It's the most infernal scheme ever concocted." "That's a bally bad guess of yours. Merry does not come into this at all." "Where did you get these?" Enoch spoke fiercely and pointed to the sheets of paper that lay under her hand. "It's rather an unusual story. Sit down and I'll tell it to you. If you are searching for a plot for that new play of yours, you might find this worth while." Wentworth threw himself into the chair in front of his desk and wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead. "Did you ever hear of George Volk?" asked Miss Paget. Enoch's forehead corrugated into a puzzled frown. "I met him in London seven years ago," she continued, "and I was such a bally fool I married him. In those days he was a heroic looking figure. If you saw him as he is today you might say I had showed poor taste." Wentworth sat staring at her with sullen curiosity. "I have found out that he is in New York and that ten years ago he had been married here. Also that his wife



"Yes, Curse It!" Repeated Zilla With an Amused Laugh.

and child are alive. Interesting situation, isn't it? Bigamy releases a woman, though I had not felt terribly fettered. I have George Volk to thank for bringing that brat across. It was one of his masterly little schemes of revenge. Then, in a curious way, I learned that Volk's wife is the woman you call Alice Bourne. He laid a scheme to get money out of her yesterday. I got a detective and planned to face him when he reached his wife." "What the devil has Volk and your matrimonial affairs to do with that?" Wentworth pointed to the sheets of paper beside her on the table. "Don't be in such a blooming hurry. I tell you the situation is dramatic. I went to the house where Alice Volk lives in Harlem—oh, I was disguised, I tell you; you would never have known me. The detective got in first and opened the area door. I slipped in and waited. He was to give me a signal when Volk arrived. A servant came clumping down the cellar stairs after coal. I hid in a closet where they store trash and—waste paper." Enoch's eyes narrowed and a yellow pallor crept over his face. "Curse it!" he spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Yes, curse it!" repeated Zilla Paget with an amused laugh. "My word! It

was a blooming queer accident! I closed the door, the latch caught and I couldn't get out. There I was, locked in that beastly hole. I struck a match. It was lucky I had a match-box along. Then I found an electric light. The first thing my eyes lit on among that waste was a sheet of paper. I picked it up. I had seen the writing before."

"Whose was it?" stammered Wentworth.

"Whose was it? Don't put up that bluff on me," cried the actress scornfully. "It was Merry's, of course. You recognized it in a second. It was the last speech I made in the second act—as it used to be—before you, the author, changed it."

"Well," cried Enoch fiercely. The woman paused and turned to him with an amused smile. "I had forgotten about George Volk. He never showed up. He does not count anyway. I found the whole play in that closet."

"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 carelessly. "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 Wentworth's face.

"I always knew," she bent over to drop a fleck of ashes on a tray beside 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 business," Enoch laughed harshly. "Perhaps," she acceded. "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 unsteadily.

"Here's the whole situation. If Miss Wentworth and you do not fancy having 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 ripping sensation. This would make one, don't you say so yourself?"

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

Miss Paget rose, unpinned 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 little 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 intruder. "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 cellar '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 myself."

"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 on two doubled-up flats dat wan't ez big ez a cotton blossom."

The old man paused to wipe his eyes with a red bandanna handkerchief.

"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 hiself 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 Mars Enoch's a-goin' to marry dat—pusson?"

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

"I will." The old servant spoke with slow impressiveness. "Fore de Lawd, I will, Missy."

She ran down the steps. Jason followed to close the carriage door when she entered. As they moved away, Dorcas leaned out to glance at the home which had been hers since school days ended.

"Drive me to the Gotham Theater," said Dorcas; "then I wish you to take this little boy to Harlem."

CHAPTER XX.

An Everyday Miracle.

That night, when the curtain fell upon the third act, Dorcas turned eagerly to Merry. "You are my friend!" she whispered.

"Miss Dorcas," the actor's voice was profoundly grave, but his eyes smiled, "I would bestride the whirlwind or set my foot upon a cyclone for you."

The girl lifted her eyes with a swift glance. She remembered the line—it was one the actor used to speak in "The King at Large."

"I believe you would." Her voice was low and impetuous. "I need a friend, a strong, patient, wise friend, as I never did in my life before."

"Miss Dorcas, you make me wish this moment that I were a Samson and a Solomon. I am not strong or very wise, but I am patient, and there is no task upon God's earth that I would not try to do for you. You believe me, don't you?"

The crimson blood flushed into her face.

"Yes." Her voice was scarcely audible. "The curtain began to ascend for an encore. 'Come to Mrs. Billerwell's tomorrow night. I am going there to stay with Alice over Sunday. I need your help.'"

He regarded her curiously for a moment. "I will come," he answered gravely. Then he took her hand and led her down to the footlights.

On Sunday evening Dorcas sat staring down into a crowded street of Harlem. Under the vivid glare of electricity the city looked sordidly ugly. It was a strange contrast to her own home. The house at Waverly Place had retained much of its stately old-time dignity and its outlook upon the three-shaded square was quiet and pleasant. Upon Harlem's sidewalk throngs of children romped and shrieked in the midst of a city's din. A balmy wind had been blowing all day long and had driven a wintry chill from the air. Knots of women sat talking on doorsteps or they leaned out to gossip from adjacent windows.

A gilt clock on the mantel struck seven. Dorcas rose, opened the door, and stood listening. On the lower floor she heard a door slam. She was trying to separate insistent noises of the street from everyday household bustle. She heard Mrs. Billerwell give an order to a servant, then Julie laughed merrily, and a light footstep sounded on the stair. On the other side of the wall a servant was preparing a room for her. She heard the girl slam a window and begin to move furniture about, while castors squeaked rebelliously. Then she felt to swooping, and Dorcas counted ab-

sently each quick scuff of the broom. Once the maid dropped it and the stick fell on the floor with a startling rap. Occasionally her dragging footsteps clattered across a bit of bare floor or she paused to thump the pillows vigorously. Dorcas was roused from her reverie by the imperative call of the telephone. She listened while Mrs. Billerwell answered it. Then the doorbell rang and she heard Merry's voice. She began to grope about the dim room in search of matches to light the gas. She was still 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 feather beneath the surface.

Dorcas stood before him trembling and irresolute. "It is so hard—loving 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 perplexity. "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 umbrella Miss Paget carries. It has a tiger's head for a handle—you remember 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 understand. I think that Enoch hates her."

"Then why is she there?"

"I do not know."

"He didn't explain?"

"No. He looked like a thundercloud. 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 lognette, 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."

"Then what has changed him?" Her eyes searched his face with a piteous scrutiny. "You know. Won't you tell me?"

"I think it is—"

The man hesitated for a word which would not hurt. "Yes, he has changed. He is not the same

old Enoch. I cannot account for this. He promised me faithfully to drop her—for keeps."

"Months ago. He has kept his promise until now. I know he has. The strange part of it is, the woman herself hates him. She says vile things about him."

"To you?"

"No, not to me!" cried Merry quickly. "She never speaks to me. We have reached the freezing point in our acquaintance."

Dorcas rose and walked to the window with her hands clasped tightly together. There were grave questions to be decided and burdens to be lifted—strange, unaccustomed burdens. She began to speak in a strange, toneless voice.

"I don't know what I'm going to do. Ever since I was a little girl there was Enoch. I never had anybody else belonging to me, only I never missed them, for I had him."

She stretched out her hands as a child might have done and raised her face to the man beside her as if in appeal for help and guidance. He took her fingers between his own with a swift grasp, caught her in his arms, and kissed her.

"Dorcas, tell me, tell me the truth. Do you love me?"

Their eyes met, and the girl understood. A bewildering happiness which transfused life throbbled through her heart and body. Merry's face was luminous, his eyes shone, he seemed transfused, in one abrupt moment, from a listless visionary to a man—alive with manly vitality.

Dorcas heard the moments ticked out by the little gilt clock on the mantel. Time did not count. The world had changed. She realized what happiness meant, a happiness which closed a door upon every intolerant thing in the world. She remembered how in the play she had simulated, night after night, the joy of a woman as she met her lover. She had spent days in working up that semblance of radiant gladness. She had played the scene many times to an outburst of applause, now she smiled, it seemed so pale and ineffectual to her today.

Andrew put his fingers under her chin, raised her face, and looked into her eyes.

"Dearest," he asked, "are you sure—sure that you love me?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Listen, don't answer for a minute. I want you to understand. I would not be satisfied unless I have everything. I want you to trust me, to believe in me, and to love me as a woman like you could love a man. One night, months ago, I had it in my heart to ask you this. That night I felt like a man who, lonely and cold, tramps through the streets of a city looking into frelit, happy homes. That night I wanted your love, your faith—yourself. You know the night I mean, when you pulled me out of hell and set my feet on the high road. Then you might have given me pity, perhaps—"

Dorcas interrupted him. She put up her hand and pushed aside the lock of hair which had strayed over his forehead.

"I do not think, then, it would have been pity—alone," she confessed.

He took her in his arms again. "A man ought to have pride and manliness enough," he said passionately, "to want his wife to love him without one touch of pity. And yet, I have wanted you so long. I have not a host of friends, like some men. I am lonely. Life has been so empty for me. I want a home, where a wife is waiting to welcome me—and little children, dear."

He lifted her hand and kissed it. "You would think me a foolish fellow if I confessed the dreams I have had. I have dreamed of you opening the door of our home, of you coming to meet me with a smile and outstretched arms. I have dreamed of feeling your kiss upon my lips, of holding you close to my heart as I do now. I have been dreaming foolish dreams like these," he laughed tremulously, "since that night in November, and I have scarcely dared to hope that you even believed in me."

Dorcas smiled into his eyes. "I have always believed in you. I never lost faith in you or in your genius for one moment. And," she paused as if making confession, "I have loved you for a long time, ever since that night, the same night, when you came back and I was so happy."

"That night," said Andrew, "was the miracle moment of my life."

"Was it so wonderful as that?" she whispered.

"When I think, dearest, of what you have stood for to me, it is a miracle."

"It is an everyday miracle!"

"There are no everyday miracles," said Merry. Then he kissed her again.

She turned away from him to stare out at the window again. On the sidewalk the rush of city life went on tumultuously. Half an hour before she had thought the street sordid and ugly. It had changed. The street lights, now clear and white, were circled about by lovely halos. The voices of the children were sweeter and gentler. Next door the servant, who was still at work, sang a lilting Irish ballad. Through it ran a constant iteration of "My own sweet lad."

"Dorcas," Merry spoke hesitatingly, "you said you trusted me?"

"I do." The girl raised her head with a quick gesture.

"I cannot explain now," he began. "I cannot ask you to be my wife until something which looks like an utter tangle has been straightened out. Can you go on trusting, even if I cannot explain?"

"Yes," Dorcas laughed. "I can go on trusting you indefinitely."

"Don't," he cried, "don't say—indefinitely. I want you now, darling, and—forever."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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REAL HOME FOR THE HOLE

Finds Secure Abiding Place After a Period of Troublous Wanderings.

Everett P. Dahlgren, the millionaire, opponent of woman suffrage, said at a suffrage debate in Boston:

"I always declare that woman shouldn't enter politics till she's filled all her prior duties."

"Prior duties! Prior duties!" So a young lady mocked me one day. "What do you mean by these 'prior duties' that you're always talking about, Mr. Dahlgren?"

"So then I told the young lady this story:

"Once upon a time, I began, a little hole was born; and it looked around to see where it should take up its abode."

"It first decided on a window, but a man came straightway and put in a new pane. It next chose a chair seat, but the housewife sent for a caner, and in a jiffy a new seat was put in the chair. The hole now selected a baby's rattle, and the baby was so pleased that it began to tear the rattle to pieces, and the poor hole, half crazed with fright, had just time to escape. It threw itself, more dead than alive, into the first thing that came to hand, which happened to be the sock of a suffragist's husband."

"There, at least, the hole seems to have found a real home. Its pease has not been troubled from the beginning, six months ago."

Died With Fortune Near. That Benjamin Vance, prospector, whose body was found in a gully at the base of a 500-foot cliff near Palo Rito pass recently, was killed after locating a rich mineral vein in the belief of S. J. Vance of Tekamah, Neb., his brother. In the prospector's cabin were a number of high-grade ore samples, cached in a secret passageway.—Crestone (Colo.) Dispatch to Denver Post.

In London. Dressmaker—If I were you, madam, I would make the skirt slashed up the front, and it would look well to have the sleeves slashed up the side, and the bodice slashed for insert on the front—

Tourist—Hold on, please! Do you take me for a fighting suffragette?

Also Barren of Wealth. "So that foreign sutor of Ethel's turned out to be no baron after all." "Oh, he was a baron, all right—Baron Munchausen."

Barring hand organs, some good comes out of everything.

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