

The Lapse of Enoch Wentworth

By
ISABEL GORDON CURTIS

Author of "The Woman from Wolverton"

Illustrations by Elsworth Young

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Into a fairly decent career there comes occasionally a moral lesson. Temptation comes, and the man, heretofore honorable and honest, falls as though his backbone were of gristle.

CHAPTER I.

The Bond.
Of course the game ended with a consolation pot. Merry and Wentworth, each with his last chip in the middle of the table, called for a showdown. All but Singleton dropped out, and he, the big winner of the evening, took the pot. Wentworth and Merry were broke.

The game had been played in Wentworth's library. Before its close the gray light of the morning began to steal past the curtains and the glow of each electric lamp took on a murky haze. Enoch Wentworth, acting as banker, cashed in the chips of the winners. Three of the men put on their hats, said "Good morning," and went out. Andrew Merry sat beside the balise-covered table with its litter of chips, pulling slowly at a cigar and staring into vacancy.

"Do you mind if I open this window?" asked Wentworth. "There's a chill in the air outdoors that will feel good. I've swallowed so much smoke my throat feels raw."

"Open every window in the room if you like, old man. I'm going home."

"Hold on a minute," cried Wentworth unexpectedly. "I'll go just one more hand. Let's play one big stake and then swear off forever."

"I tell you, Enoch, I haven't a cent. Heaven knows how I can tide over these months until the season opens. It's a good thing I'm not a married man," Merry laughed mirthlessly.

"One last hand!" pleaded Wentworth.

"What do you want to play for?" Merry turned up a card and stared at his cuff buttons thoughtfully. "I have nothing left but these. I don't think I'll put them up."

"We've thrown away enough money and collateral tonight," Wentworth replied. "Let's make this stake something unique—sentimental, not financial. Why not make it your future against mine?"

"That's a great stake! Shant I throw in my past?"

"No, let each of us play for the other's future. It is a more fancy of mine, but it appeals to me."

"Are you serious? What in God's name would you do with my future if you won it—what should I do with yours?"

"I tell you, it's a mere fancy of mine."

"All right. Carry out your fancy, if it amuses you. I ought to be willing to stake my life against yours on any hand, if you say so."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, if you want to call me."

Andrew Merry smiled and blew a flurry of smoke rings into the marble face of the Shakespeare, while he watched Wentworth's pen scribble across a sheet of paper. The newspaper man handed it to him with the ink still wet.

"There," he said, "we'll play for that document, the winner's name to be written at the top, the loser to write his name at the bottom."

Andrew Merry read it aloud:

To
I hereby pledge myself until death—to do your every bidding—to obey your every demand—to the extent of my physical and mental ability—to furnish me with support.

"Will that hold good in law?"

"Just so long as the loser is a man of honor—no longer. Are you going to waken?"

"I'll be damned if I am. I'll put this bit of paper in my scrapbook."

"The man who wins, keeps that bit of paper," Wentworth answered with a whimsical smile.

He tossed the unsigned bond into the center of the table and shuffled the cards with grave deliberation. Merry lit a fresh cigar and puffed it meditatively. Upon each listless brain began to dawn the realization that this was a stake of greater import than the rolls of bills which had grown lighter and lighter till the last greenback vanished.

"Who'll deal?" asked Wentworth.

"We'll cut," Merry spoke quietly.

"Low deals, ace low."

Enoch Wentworth cut a tray, Merry a seven spot. Wentworth shuffled the cards again and held them out to his opponent.

"Does one hand decide it?"

"Yes, one hand. Each man to discard, draw, and show down."

Wentworth dealt with noticeable deliberation. They picked up their hands.

"Give me four cards," said Merry.

"I'll take three," Wentworth's face was as solemn as his voice.

For a moment each man sat staring at his hand. Then Merry spoke.

"There's no use in showing down," he said. "I haven't even one little pair."

"Hold on," expostulated Wentworth, scarcely concealing the relief which his friend's admission gave him. "I'm only ace high. Does that beat you?"

Merry's face also told its story of defeat. "Same here," he said, laying

the card on the table face up, "and a jolly king to follow it."

"King for me, too," Wentworth's face flushed and his voice grew impatient. "What's your next card?"

"A ten," Merry replied tranquilly, too tense to wonder why Enoch awaited his declaration.

"Ten here. My God! are they all aces?"

"Seven next."

"And mine's a seven!"

Both men paused, each with his eyes on the other's card.

"And a four," cried Wentworth irritably. He passed his hand across his forehead; it was moist and cold.

"You win." When Merry tossed down his hand a tray turned over—it was the same tray which gave Wentworth the deal.

Wentworth had drawn to an ace and Merry held up a king. The younger man lifted a pen, dipped it in the ink, and scrawled Enoch Wentworth across the slip of paper. At the bottom he wrote with grave deliberation, Andrew Merry, and handed the paper to Wentworth.

The newspaper man stared at it for a moment, then dropped it on the table, laid his cheek on the palm of his hand, and, looking straight in the face of the actor, asked: "Merry, do you realize what this means?"

"Not yet, perhaps; still I wish you more luck of my life than I've had. Now, since I'm to look to you for support, could you spare up a nickel? I've got to ride home, you know."

Before Wentworth could reply, the curtains parted, and a girl's figure showed itself for a brief moment.

"I beg your pardon, Enoch, I thought you were alone," she said, and the figure vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

"Who's that?" Merry demanded.

Wentworth's only answer was to pull out the lining of his pocket. From one he produced a quarter and handed it to the actor. Merry pocketed it without further questioning, and pulled on his gloves.

"Good night," he said, "or good morning, whichever you choose."

"Say, old man," Wentworth held the door for a moment half closed while he spoke. "Say, if you don't mind, let's keep this transaction to ourselves."

"I'm willing," Merry paused to strike a light for his last cigar, then

he laid his hands solemnly across his breast. "Cross my heart," he added in a sepulchral tone.

Wentworth started at the sound of an opening door. A girl entered.

"For heaven's sake, Dorry! What are you doing up at this unearthly hour?"

"I've had my sleep, you haven't," she answered with a laugh.

"Dorcas, sit down," said her brother. "Do you see that fellow on the bench under a tree?"

The girl leaned a hand on Wentworth's shoulder while she turned her eyes in the direction his finger pointed.

"Yes! What's the matter with him? Is he anybody you know? Is he in trouble?"

"He's an old friend of mine. It's Andrew Merry, the comedian."

Wentworth sat for a moment gazing into his sister's beautiful face. She was a child in spite of her eighteen years. He felt like an ancient, sin-battered, soiled, city-worn hulk of humanity as he returned the straightforward gaze of her gray eyes.

"Tell me about him, Enoch."

"I ran across him when I was doing dramatics on the Pittsburgh Union. He was a genial lad, but there wasn't much for him to tell an interviewer. He had been born and raised in a western town and then apprenticed to a country bank. He hated figures and loved the stage. He stuck to the ledgers for a while because he was all his mother had, I guess she worshiped him."

"How did he happen to go on the stage?"

"Come on to New York, as they all do sooner or later, and began with a turn in a vaudeville house. He had a r:ched salary of fifty a week. He was perfectly happy except for one thing—he couldn't get the mother's loneliness out of his mind. They wrote to each other every day."

"I think I should like him," suggested Dorcas.

"I gave Merry all the space next morning instead of the dancer, and he wrote me a grateful letter. I didn't see him again until two years later, when I came to New York. I found his name in the cast of a light opera company on Broadway. He was pretty far down the list, but before the thing had run two weeks he was moved up to second place. His work was unusual. He's the funniest Merry Andrew I ever saw, yet once in a while there's a touch of whimsical, fearful pathos in his antics that makes a man-wink."

"Take me to see him," cried the girl eagerly.

"We'll go tomorrow. It's his singing

AUTHOR OF A GREAT STORY



Isabel Gordon Curtis.

Isabel Gordon Curtis, author of "The Lapse of Enoch Wentworth," is one of the best-known literary women of America and for years her name has been familiar to readers of household and farm periodicals and of fiction. She was born fifty years ago in Huntley, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and after receiving an academic education in that country, came to the United States in 1886. For several years she did general literary work, and then she was successively literary editor of the New England Homestead and Farm and Home, dramatic editor of the Springfield Homestead, associated with her husband, Francis Curtis, as editor of the Binghamton Chronicle; associate editor of Good Housekeeping, and editor of the woman's department of Success Magazine. In addition to all these activities, she has found time since 1903 to do a great deal of general magazine work and juvenile story writing, and in recent years has written several novels that proved highly successful and popular. Some of these deal with official and social life in Washington, with which Mrs. Curtis is thoroughly familiar and which she portrays with vivid reality.

The greatest work Mrs. Curtis has produced, "The Lapse of Enoch Wentworth," is a story of the New York stage and an old-fashioned romance. It is a story with a high moral purpose, and one which holds the interest of the reader to the end. The reviewers generally have pronounced it one of the greatest of American novels.

It is with considerable pleasure that we are able to announce that we have arranged for the serial publication rights on this story, the first installment of which will appear soon. We earnestly advise all readers to watch for it.

great in "The Lapse of Enoch Wentworth." He's a bigger favorite than several of the big stars, yet—it's the queerest thing—in all these years he's never taken the step that would bring him to the top.

"Why?"

"The Lord knows. One manager died, another went under. It's the uncertainty of stage life."

"She died suddenly last season. A fool usher gave Merry the telegram in the middle of a performance, when he went off the stage. He dropped as he'd been shot. They rang down the curtain until the understudy could get into his toga. He didn't act for two months. I thought he would never brace up. I had him here half the winter trying to cheer him. He gave me the dumps."

"Poor fellow," cried Dorcas.

"I roused him through his pride. He hadn't a cent to his name, so I shamed him into going back to work. He earns lots of money, but it gets away from him."

Wentworth's gaze turned to the litter of chips on the table. His sister's eyes followed.

"Is it that?" she asked.

"Fairly."

The girl rose to her feet. She put her hands on her brother's shoulders and gazed down into his face.

"Enoch," she said hesitatingly, "I wish you wouldn't. You could help your friend if you would turn over a new leaf yourself."

"We both swore off tonight for good and all, little girl. Wentworth took her hands between his own and looked into her eyes with a resolute look."

"I want you to help both of us—Merry and me. The evil of the world was never whispered inside convent walls. You've left a quiet, simple life—for a very different world. There's more mission work waiting you right here than you've had taken the veil."

"Eno," the girl's face was grave and earnest, "Enoch, nothing would ever make me take the veil. I have only one ambition—I want to go on the stage."

"Good Lord!" cried Wentworth, "I never dreamed of such a future—for you."

"You don't know stage life as I do," he continued seriously. "There are women—and men for that matter—who go into the profession clean skinned, clean souled. They spend their lives in it and come out clean; but there are experiences they never forget."

"Is life as bad as that?" the girl asked simply.

"Life is as bad," her brother answered slowly, "and yet I would as willingly see you go on the stage as into society—I mean fashionable society, as I know it here in New York. A newspaper man sees the under side of life."

"It would not hurt me." The girl tossed back a heavy braid of hair which fell over her shoulder, and knelt at Wentworth's knee.

"I have you always to turn to, big brother," she whispered. She laid her cheek fondly against his hand. "Don't you remember that need to be the only name I had for you? You were so his

me never as a young girl. The thought was so absurd that he smiled; any colliish awkwardness must have disappeared with short frocks! Merry stared at the girl with bewildered admiration, wondering now why he had never felt the mildest curiosity about Wentworth's sister. He became conscious that he was making a mental analysis; she had black-fringed gray eyes; warmth and dancing blood glowed in her face, for she had the coloring of a Jack rose; a mass of auburn hair was coiled in a loose knot at the back of her head; she wore no hat; a band of dull-blue velvet was tied about her head and fell in a loose bow over her ear, but strands of hair, which glowed like copper in the sunshine, had escaped and blew about her face; she had the tender mouth of a child. In the straightforward eyes was sweet womanliness, gentle determination, and a lack of feminine vanity which Merry had seldom seen in the face of a beautiful woman. He even forgot to drop her hand while he gazed into her face, half admiringly, half perplexedly.

"I've brought Mr. Merry down to stay with us till we go home," Wentworth announced.

"I'm delighted," cried Dorcas cordially.

Next morning after breakfast Enoch and his sister rowed out to deep water with their fishing outfit. Merry still was in bed; he was tired, he pleaded, and could not immediately acquire the habit of early rising.

"What do you think of Andrew?" asked Dorcas abruptly. He lifted his head after the task of baiting a hook and looked into his sister's face.

"I think he ought to be waked up."

"To join our fishing trip?"

"I mean waked in his ambitions. He seems to me like a man who has no goal in sight. He needs something to work for. He spoke last night of one ambition he has—"

"Sort of moonlight confidences?" queried her brother.

"No—not that. He's determined to jump straight into a part that will bring the heart out of his listeners."

"That's foolish. The public wants just so much versatility. You can't kill off a beloved comedian to resurrect a new emotional actor, no matter how good he may be. People won't stand for it."

"He isn't satisfied." The girl pulled up her line and tossed away a morsel

of nibbled bait, covering the hook with a fresh clam.

"Some greedy fish had a square meal off your bait and never got the hook in his gullet. He'll come back for more, then get caught. It's the same story with human beings."

"Philosopher!" laughed Dorcas. She dropped her line again into deep water and waited for her brother's prediction to come true.

Merry had breakfasted before their return. He sat upon the vine-green piazza, gazing at the sparkle of the ocean, when the two agile figures stepped across his vision.

"Well, Sir Lassy, so you're up!" cried the girl. "You should have been with us to find an appetite. See our fish! Here's a dinner for you!"

"I'm going to turn over a new leaf," said Merry. His eyes were fixed on the girl's glowing face, and for a moment he shared her intense enjoyment of life.

"Will you turn it over tomorrow morning at sunrise?" she demanded.

"Even so soon, most gracious lady. He swept her a stage bow, his soft hat trailing the ground as if it had been a cavalier's cap loaded with plumes.

Matching his grace, the girl turned to him, laughing, with the mock dignity of a queen.

"I command that at early dawn, when the tide goes out, ye ho three to you flats and dig clams for our savory meal."

"I shall obey, most royal highness," answered Merry solemnly.

"I believe he is waking up," thought Dorcas as she ran upstairs to dress for the noon dinner. "If he does that, I'll believe he has some backbone."

When Dorcas and her brother came down next morning for breakfast, Merry had disappeared.

"I'm glad I'm not your victim," said Wentworth, with a note of sympathy in his voice.

"Enoch," the girl turned to him gravely, "I told you he needed waking up, and this is a good start. It won't hurt him a bit."

"Poor Merry! What a sight!"

"The waked him come tramping over the beach. He wore Farmer Hutchins' overalls rolled up to his knees and a flapping cow-breakfast hat. He carried a clam fork and occasionally shifted a heavy basket of clams from one arm to the other."

CHAPTER III.

Cassiopea's Chair.

Dorcas Wentworth, stopped on the street as she came and looked down. A

few feet below her, on a stage like a wide sheet, Merry lay watching the man, trusting to luck to see him through, steals for years, covering his defilements in the clearest way. He had to get money, for his wife denies herself nothing. The father-in-law discovers the crime, exposes it to his daughter, then drops dead. She gives her husband up to public justice. His trial comes off and he is sentenced to twenty years. The child is told that she is fatherless. The wife takes her father's fortune and goes West. When the second act opens she has divorced the husband and married again. The child is a lovely, true-hearted woman. She is engaged to the young mayor of the city, and preparations are afoot for the wedding, when she receives a letter from the one man who remained loyal to her father—an old janitor at the bank. He tells her the story which had been hidden from her. The father, penniless, broken down, hopeless, is to leave prison in a few weeks. She confronts her mother, who denies the story, but later confesses. The girl breaks her engagement, leaves home, and goes East. The old janitor takes her to live near the prison until her father is released. Every day she watches the convicts at their lock-step tramp and sees her father. The closing of that act, when she meets him leaving prison, can be tremendous in human interest."

He turned to look at Dorcas.

"Go on," she said.

"The last act is laid in a New England village, among simple country people. The girl and her father are living on a little farm. Her lover comes, having searched for her everywhere. She tells him the story. He marries her and takes the father home with them."

Merry paused. The sun had dropped below the horizon and the western sky glowed in red, gold and purple.

"When," cried Dorcas in a flush of enthusiasm, "when will you begin to write?"

"At once, tomorrow. I'll go away somewhere; I can't do it here."

"Go to Enoch," she said. "He will be delighted. He has such faith in you and he loves you. Besides, you'll have his sympathy. Poor Enoch, the one ambition of his life is to be a famous dramatist."

"No!" said Merry incredulously.

"Don't tell him you know it. I discovered it by accident. I was tidying his desk one day. I came on a pile of manuscript. There were dramas, comedies, tragedies, even comic operas. He has been writing that sort of thing for years and years."

"Queer he never told me! What were they like?"

"Don't think me disloyal, but they are awful! Some day, when he gets a great plot, he thinks he will succeed. He won't. It was cruel to tell him so. He's nothing but an expert newspaper man."

"Dear, good, generous old Enoch!" "You will never tell him—never!" "I won't," said Merry.

They sat for a few minutes in silence. The flush of the sunset began to fade from the sky. Seagulls wheeled above their heads.

"We must go home," said Andrew. "Crossing these rocks in the dusk would be perilous."

Dorcas rose and followed him, clasping his outstretched hand. When they leaped down from the sea wall to the beach, the girl asked: "This is our last evening here?"

"I imagine so. You go to New Haven next week, don't you?" Dorcas nodded.

"Think of me working with all the courage and energy you have awakened. When the play is written I will bring it straight to you."

There was eager anticipation in her eyes. "When you come I will ask a favor. May I play the daughter of the convict?"

"You!" Andrew stopped and looked down at her intently. "You—you—dear child, you sweet, gracious woman!"

Dorcas lifted her cool hands to her blushing cheeks.

"Listen! You don't think I could do it. I could. I have loved Shakespeare since I was a little girl. I know Juliet and Desdemona and Rosalind, but I've lived with Cordelia. I've loved her. I've seen into her soul. Your girl is Cordelia. I could play the part even if I have never been on the stage. Besides I can work; oh, you ought to see how I can work when I have to!"

"It is not that," Andrew protested. "You could play Cordelia—we'll call the girl Cordelia—now—as no one I know. It is not that. It is such a hard life—the one you would choose, and it is so different from anything you know."

Dorcas spoke impatiently. "Enoch said that. If I should go on the stage I would be no different from what I am today."

"Let us go home. There's Mrs. Hutchins' supper hour."

They walked on in silence. That evening Merry sat for half an hour with an idle pen in his hand. At last he pulled a sheet of paper toward him and wrote in feverish haste:

Dear old Enoch—Send me \$100 to the Broadway today, please. Don't ask questions, don't try to find me; I'll turn up when I've finished some work.

Your slave,
MERRY.

(To be continued)

Merry Stared Down into the Girl's Face.

mother when I was a boy. If I promised faithfully I would do anything, I shook hands on it."

Dorcas held out her hand cordially. Her clasp was magnetic.

"Sit down again and listen," he begged. "For years and years and years I've had a play crystallizing in my mind. It's all blocked out. Let me tell you about it."

Dorcas sat leaning forward, her face between her hands, her eyes glowing with interest.

"My hero is cashier in a bank, a young fellow of good family, jovial, happy-go-lucky, generous, democratic. He has married the bank president's daughter, who is exactly his opposite—cold blooded, haughty, selfish and fond of luxury. There is a sweet tandem

little daughter. The love between the father and the child is beautiful. The man, trusting to luck to see him through, steals for years, covering his defilements in the clearest way. He had to get money, for his wife denies herself nothing. The father-in-law discovers the crime, exposes it to his daughter, then drops dead. She gives her husband up to public justice. His trial comes off and he is sentenced to twenty years. The child is told that she is fatherless. The wife takes her father's fortune and goes West. When the second act opens she has divorced the husband and married again. The child is a lovely, true-hearted woman. She is engaged to the young mayor of the city, and preparations are afoot for the wedding, when she receives a letter from the one man who remained loyal to her father—an old janitor at the bank. He tells her the story which had been hidden from her. The father, penniless, broken down, hopeless, is to leave prison in a few weeks. She confronts her mother, who denies the story, but later confesses. The girl breaks her engagement, leaves home, and goes East. The old janitor takes her to live near the prison until her father is released. Every day she watches the convicts at their lock-step tramp and sees her father. The closing of that act, when she meets him leaving prison, can be tremendous in human interest."

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