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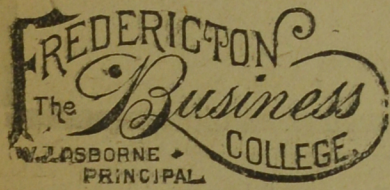
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## The Lapse of Enoch Wentworth

ISABEL GORDON CURTIS

Author of "The Woman  
from Wolverton"

Illustrations by Ellsworth Young

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### CHAPTER V.

#### The Forfeit of the Bond.

The telephone in Enoch Wentworth's room rang insistently. He had gone to bed three hours before, and he struggled to shake off sheer, stupid drowsiness. He rushed to the telephone. Its ring had become peremptory.

"Hullo," he called briskly.  
"Hullo, old chap," Merry answered him gaily. "The top o' the morning to you."

"Good morning," Wentworth's alertness died in a second. Something flashed back to his mind, something unpleasant, and an ugly frown corrugated his brow.

"Grouchy this morning?" cried Merry with a laugh. "Or say, did I wake you from your beauty sleep?"

"You certainly did."

"Old man, I'm sorry, blamed sorry. Some day I'll show you I'm grateful. I couldn't sleep last night, I lay thinking of something I can do for you when my production begins to pay. I'm going to drag you away from the everlasting grind. We'll go to Switzerland next summer and carry out your dream. We'll sit on mountain tops, crane our necks over the edge of a crevasse, and skid down a glacier."

"I'd rather go back to bed," growled Wentworth.

"You lazy old duffer, you may go in a second, only I want to talk to you about the luckiest sort of accident. Last night I ran across a fellow who's rolling in money. He's crazy to get in on a theatrical venture. We can catch him, I know. I want you to have a big share, to manage the thing and make all you can out of it."

"Did you tell him it was—your play?" Enoch's tone was brusque.

"No, I thought I'd break that gently. He thinks now I'm a devil of an actor; he might imagine I couldn't have so much versatility; that my play might be of the brand some actors turn out."

"Good," cried Enoch, warmly. "You have more sense than I gave you credit for."

"Really? Now, old pal, go back to bed. But tell me first when I can see you. I want a long talk with you."

"Make it four. I've a pile of work to do before that time."

"All right, four o'clock. Good-by."

Wentworth hung up the receiver and passed a hand across his forehead; it was cold and damp. He did not return to bed, but dressed hurriedly, pausing once or twice to stare at himself in the mirror. His face looked unfamiliar. It seemed to have aged. There were lines about the clean-shaven mouth he had never noticed before.

At four o'clock Enoch sat in his library. He was so absorbed that he did not hear a step in the hall. When he lifted his eyes Merry stood before him. Wentworth stared for a second before he took the outstretched hand.

Merry had changed. He looked young, handsome and vivacious—he was better groomed. A few stems of Roman hyacinths sat jauntily in his buttonhole. His trimness seemed odd in contrast to the old whimsical carelessness, as if he had already achieved fame and was living up to it, dressing up to it. These were the thoughts that flashed through Wentworth's mind while Merry took his hands affectionately between his own. Andrew was only a few years younger than Enoch, but occasionally he fell into fond, demonstrative ways which were boyish. Wentworth drew his hand away suddenly and pointed to the low chair opposite. His friend sat down half perplexed, half anxious.

"Say, old man, aren't you well? You look groggy."

"I'm well enough."

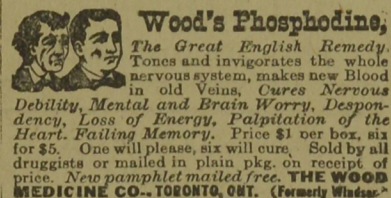
"You're working too hard, you always did."

Wentworth did not answer. His eyes were studying a pattern in the rug beneath his feet.

"Say, Enoch, you're going to tend to the whole business, aren't you?"

The newspaper man lifted his eyes.

"Yes, I'm going to tend to the whole business. I'll make it the finest production that New York has seen in



There may be some uncertainties about the human losses in the present war, but every financier and political economist seems to be able to reckon the financial losses with no uncertainty.

years. "The House of Esterbrook" is going to win money and—fame."

"Good!" Merry jumped up and flung his arms around the shoulders of the older man.

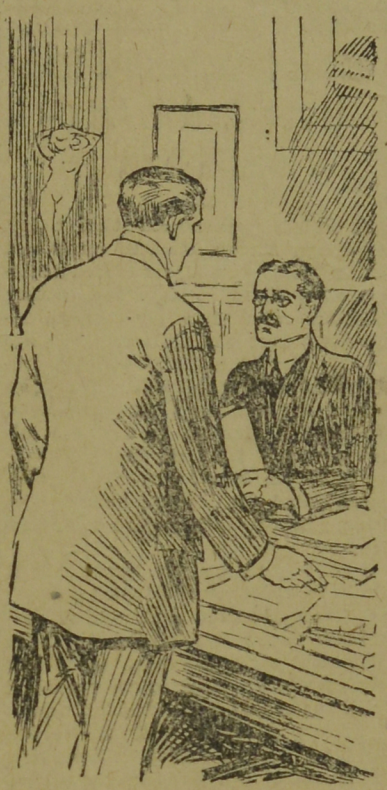
"Sit down," said Enoch. "We're going to talk business."

He rose, walked to his desk, and emptied a drawerful of papers on the table. Merry watched him with a puzzled expression.

"You never guessed, Andrew, that your ambition was mine?" Enoch did not lift his eyes or pause for a reply. "For years and years and years I have dreamed just one dream, only one—that some day I might produce a great play. See how I worked!" He swept the manuscript into an untidy heap. There were thousands of sheets. He had written on paper like onion skin. It looked like toil—one had a feeling of years of toil—after a glance at the laboriously interlined and reconstructed sentences. Wentworth crushed it mercilessly into loose bunches and began to lay the pages by handfuls upon the reviving fire. A little flame climbed up and kindled them into a wavering blaze.

"Here, here, Enoch, old fellow," cried Merry, "don't!" There was a thrill of compassion in his voice. "Say, don't—this is a wicked thing to do."

Wentworth paid no heed to him. He gathered the sheets together with



When He Lifted His Eyes Merry Stood Before Him.

quiet deliberation, crushing them as one would crush some hated, despised living thing, and burned them with stolid satisfaction.

"That funeral's over," he said abruptly. "Now I'm in a mood for—business." He turned to his desk. Merry's eyes followed him. They were dim with unspoken sympathy, but he knew the man well enough not to put it into words.

Wentworth pulled out his key-ring, opened a drawer, and took the slip of paper from the yellow envelope. He stood staring at it for a moment. A wave of crimson swept across his face, then his mouth straightened into a cruel, inexorable line. Merry's eyes were still fixed on him. Enoch did not speak, but crossed the room with the paper in his hand and laid it on the table beside Merry. Andrew's eye took it in with one sweeping glance; it was the bond he had signed when they played that last hand of poker.

"Do you remember this?" asked Wentworth abruptly.

"Of course. Say, old chap, what has that to do with our business? Oh, I know." He lifted his eyes with a relieved glance. "Of course it's an understood thing you're to run things, and as for money, Lord, I don't care for money. Take all you want of it. It's fame my heart's set on; I've a grand ambition and a thirst for greatness—as I told you—but it runs in only one direction; to win a name as a dramatist, a name that will live when my capering days are over. I want a halo; not such an aureole as Shakespeare's," his eyes sparkled and a smile lighted his face, "but a halo—I demand a halo. I'll be satisfied with nothing smaller than a cartwheel."

He rose and went prancing buoyantly about the room on his toe tips, humming a fantastic waltz from "The King at Large." Wentworth sat with a grim, brooding look in his eyes. Andrew stopped to stare at him.

"Why so mum, sweet Sirrah?" he asked blithely.

"Merry," Wentworth spoke in an expressionless voice, "read that bond through—carefully. Read it aloud."

The actor picked up the sheet of paper and read it with dramatic gestures, bowing almost prostrate at each pause.

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He dropped lightly upon his knees in front of Wentworth when he finished. "I await thine orders, most grave and reverend seigneur." Then he laid his fingers upon Wentworth's arm and looked up with an expectant smile.

Enoch wrenched his arm free and rose awkwardly to his feet. The comedian drew back with a startled expression, as if fear struggled with bewilderment.

"You see," Enoch's lips were per-

(To Be Continued.)

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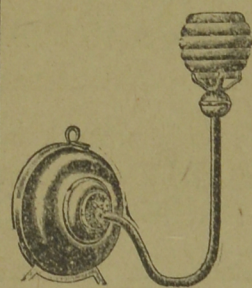
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