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The LAPSE of ENOCH WENTWORTH

By ISABEL GORDON CURTIS

Author of "The Woman from Wolverton"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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"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 at
his mother's side, I guess she worshiped
him."

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

"Came on to New York, as they al-

do sooner or later, and began with a

turn in a vaudeville house. He had

earned a salary of fifty a week. It

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," sug-

gested 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 un-

usual. He's the funniest Merry An-

drew I ever saw, yet once in a while

there's a touch of whimsical, tearful

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 closing

night in 'The King at Large.' 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 un-

certainty of stage life."

"And his mother?" asked Dorcas.

"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 if

he'd been shot. They rang down the

curtain until the understudy could get

into his tugs. He didn't act for two

months. I thought he would never

brace up. I had him here half the win-

ter 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 lit-

ter of chips on the table. His sister's

eyes followed.

"Is it that?" she asked.

"Partly."

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 were 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 led a quiet, simple life—for a

very different world. There's more

mission work waiting you right here

than if you had taken the veil."

"Enoch," 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 used to be the only

name I had for you? You were so big,

so strong, so wise and so—old. I used

to sit on the gatepost, waiting for you

to come home. Don't you remember

our Saturday tramps, how we used to

play 'I spy' in the orchard, and went

bird-nesting, picnicking and fishing,

or playing 'I spy' on the island?"

Enoch clasped her hands tightly. "I

remember, little Dorcas. They were

the happiest days in my life."

"Let us get out of the city," cried

the girl. Their eyes turned to the sun-

lit square below. The morning rush

of New York life had begun, with its

clang of bells and thunder of vehicles.
"Dorcas, I'm off to bed. I haven't
shut an eye for 24 hours."

CHAPTER II.

The Measure of a Man.

A week later Wentworth and his sister
left town for a vacation. They had
discovered an old-fashioned farm-
house on a quiet stretch of shore, and
settled down contentedly to a simple,
outdoor life. One morning a telegram
broke their solitude.

"I have half an hour to catch a train
to the city," said Enoch, as he tumbled
out of a hammock. "You may drive

me to the depot if you wish, Dorcas."

"You're not called back to that hot

office," she cried wistfully, "after a

vacation of only three days?"

"It isn't the paper, Dorcas; it's

Merry. Get into the buggy; I'll tell

you about it on our way to the station.

You may drive."

He leaned back comfortably in the wide seat. "You

like driving, I don't."

"What's the matter with Mr.

Merry?" Dorcas asked. "Is he ill?"

"Not that, but he's in danger of kill-

ing his career. He's going up the state

to a little one-horse town to play lead-

ing roles in a ten, twenty, thirty stock

company."

"Why does he do that?"

"I guess he's broke. I can't tell

until I see him. I'll be back tonight, or

tomorrow at the latest. I'll wire you

what train. You'll meet me, won't

you?"

"Of course," she promised.

Next morning the two men stood on

the platform of the smoker on a shore

accommodation train, which sauntered

from one small station to the next,

skirting the water for miles.

Andrew Merry tossed a half-smoked

cigar into a swamp beside the track

where the thin, green blades of cat-

tails were whipped by the breeze.

"I don't believe I want to mix odors

this morning," he said.

"It is great ozone," Wentworth

lifted his hat to let the wind cool his

head. "There's the little station now!

I'll bet that speck of white is Dorcas!"

"How queer that I've never met

your sister," Merry suggested. "Is she

grown up?"

Wentworth laughed. "Almost," he

admitted. "You did see her once."

Merry followed Wentworth as the

train stopped. In a half-dazed fashion

he shook hands with a tall young

woman in a white linen gown. Was

this the child—long limbed, gawky and