

# The LAPSE of ENOCH WENTWORTH

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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SYNOPSIS.

Enoch Wentworth, actor, play boy and polo player, has control of the future of the lesser Wentworth wife. They decide to keep the master secret. Dorcas, looking from her brother, Enoch, Merry, the stage manager, 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. Wentworth is content. He sends it to Wentworth whom life ambition is to write a successful play. He demands Merry's play as a forfeit if the woman wins.

Preparations for staging the play are begun, but Merry, who is to take the leading part, is missing. Dorcas proves a good actress in the play, but she 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.

CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"Here is the second act," said Wentworth brusquely. "I imagine it will suit you. The changes are exactly what you suggested."

"Oh, splendid!" Oswald's voice was cordial. "I'm ever so glad you feel like it. You will say yourself it is an improvement."

"I hope so," Enoch spoke listlessly. "And, Dingley, while I think of it, send a message back to Miss Paget. Ask if I can see her now, in her dressing-room for a few minutes." He turned to Oswald. "I must explain to her the change we're making. Better have the part copied at once; it must be put into quick rehearsal."

CHAPTER XIV.

The Opening Night.

Dorcas stood motionless in the wings, with Merry beside her, leaning against a table. The curtain had fallen on the third act of "The House of Esterbrook." The girl's body throbbed from head to foot, and she felt as if the emotions of a lifetime had been crowded into that single hour. There was a babel of noise behind the scenes; in front the applause sounded like a tempest. At intervals the hand-claps died away as from weariness, only to begin again with tremendous vigor.

"Come," said Merry; "we must go out again."

"Again?" whispered the girl.

"Yes," Merry smiled; "this time the two of us alone."

"The two of us?"

"Two of us alone." There was a low, tender thrill in Merry's voice.

He took her hand and led her out upon the empty stage. The curtain was lifting slowly. From where she stood she saw Enoch standing in the wings. His face was flushed with excitement. The audience looked to the girl like a blur of color and human forms. The people swayed forward eagerly, and the applause became uproarious. A voice cried, "Speech! Speech!" It began to come insistently from the back of the house. The cry was taken up by men and women everywhere in the audience. Dorcas turned to Merry, Oswald was beckoning to him from the wings, but the actor shook his head.

"I could not make a speech tonight if my life depended on it," he whispered, and the curtain descended slowly.

A new cry came from the clamorous house. Some one was shouting for the author. Dorcas laid her hand upon Merry's arm.

"They want you," she cried.

He smiled and shook his head.

She heard Oswald urge Enoch to go in front of the curtain. The noise in front grew louder. The girl flew across the stage and put her hand upon her brother's shoulder.

"Enoch," she pleaded in a whisper, "take Merry with you and explain."

Wentworth left her without a word.

Oswald and the stage manager beckoned to him from the wings. She took a few flying steps as if to hold him back, then stopped. Merry had called her. She paused, staring into his eyes with terror.

"Enoch must not go out there alone," she protested in a low voice.

"He must not do it. You should be with him. It is the last chance he has to make restitution. He will never, never do such a thing as this!"

"Listen," she heard Merry's whisper, "take Merry with you and explain."

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