

# HEART of GOLD

A St. Valentine's Day Story  
By HOWARD FIELDING.

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I PAUSED outside the door of Austen's studio and fixed a dollar bill so that a corner of it would stick out of my waistcoat pocket. There was no use asking him whether he needed money. He would always repel the insinuation, even when he hadn't had any luncheon and was fierce eyed with hunger. Neither could he be caught by an open display of coin or bills, but if a bit of money was in sight and Austen didn't know that the owner thereof was aware of it he would betray his need by occasional glances full of gentle and pathetic longing.

Let me hasten to say that Austen was not a failure in the ordinary, old fashioned way. He used to make a good living from illustrations, cover designs and the better kind of potboiling in general, but he had a serious illness, and while he lay unconscious some of his friends became over-anxious and called in too much medical talent. In the present state of the world Austen might better have died, perhaps, than have contracted such a heavy debt. He paid it and hadn't a penny with which to begin work.

Conditions have changed in the last ten or fifteen years, and capital is essential to the artist. Life presses him so hard that he can't both work and live unless he has money in the bank or enjoys some form of special favor from those who have. Otherwise he will be like a swimmer in an undertow—the best that he can hope for is to keep his nose above water.

When I entered the studio, Austen was admiring the last fruit of his own toil. It was a little thing in oil, a girl looking at a shield which bore a device of a heart of gold and a scroll in which one could discover the date Feb. 14.

I took it to be a cover design for a February issue of a magazine or for some special purpose incident to St. Valentine's day, and I deplored the waste of time. It was then the tenth day of the shortest month, and this thing could not be used by anybody until next year.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It's a beauty," I replied. "You'll sell it—if you live."

"No, I won't," said he, with decision. "I didn't make it to sell."

My mouth was open to reply that he shouldn't make anything for any other purpose when the picture itself checked me. A flash of memory illumined my understanding.

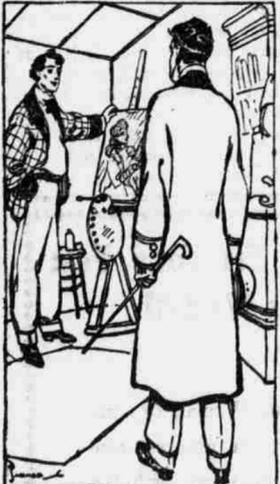
"Isn't that the girl—I saw her only once—the girl who?"

"Yes," said he, interrupting. "It is the girl who makes all other girls look like—like the crude and meaningless objects which I usually draw when I try to draw girls. But this is different, isn't it?"

"My boy, you are right," said I. "This is the only genuine, and all others are base imitations. What are you going to do with it?"

"I shall commit the gross absurdity of sending it to her as a valentine," said he. "Wish I could afford a frame, but I can't. The express charges will wind me up. In fact—His eye at that moment lighted upon the green bait protruding from my waistcoat pocket, and he gave a little gasp as a man sometimes will when his stomach is empty.

"However," he continued, "she won't be bound to go to the expense of framing it. She can ask the butler to set it in the back cellar just as it is and



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know that my feelings are safe, because I shall never find out what becomes of it."

"Isn't she in the city?"

"No," said he. "I guess the family will live in Morristown all winter unless they go abroad. I've been asked to go out, but I haven't any clothes and the round trip costs \$120. The chances are, old man, that I shall not see her again, and so I thought I'd better paint this portrait from memory right now. I'm in danger of forgetting her," he added, with a mournful smile.

On the contrary, it had been my opinion that Austen was very greatly in danger of not forgetting her. She

was, to all intents and purposes, an inhabitant of another planet, and it was extremely unfortunate that he had ever met her. These accidents are less frequent than they used to be, but we are still imperfectly civilized, and there are parts of the golden wall which a poor man can see over. Austen was both susceptible and constant and likely to have trouble enough without adding a hopeless love.

I did not then know that Miss Copeland had any considerable sum of money in her own right or any expectations beyond the share in her father's estate which would eventually fall to her, which, unless I misjudged Mr. Copeland, would not be liberal if his daughter should marry a poor man, and might be nothing at all. The true state of the young lady's finances has since become known to me, and I am willing to admit that my conduct toward Austen was not calculated to subserve his best worldly interests.

In short, to drop the style of envious sarcasm which we who live in cities



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now adopt when we speak of the rich, I honestly thought that it would be a double error for Austen to send this remarkable valentine to Miss Copeland. In the first place, he couldn't afford to do so, for the picture was amazingly good, and, with a slight suppression of the likeness, would certainly be salable some time. In the second place, it could not fall to evoke an answer from Miss Copeland and thus revive an acquaintance which could only result in pain and disappointment to my friend.

"Billy," said I, "you mustn't commit this folly. Here's the best thing you have ever done, and you ought to work it so that you can set yourself on your feet again."

"Yes?" said he. "How hard do you suppose the express company will swat me to take this out to Morristown? And again he eyed the corner of my dollar.

I argued the case with him, but I might as well have addressed my remarks to the jolted dummy of wood which he used as a model. The best I could do was to persuade him to hold the picture two or three days before sending it. He had intended to ship it right away, in fear lest the landlord might do something disagreeable in the way of padlocking the door or otherwise attempting to collect the rent by violence.

I lent Austen the dollar, and while he was holding it in his hand and contemplating it with a trance-like stare I deftly picked the inside breast pocket of his waistcoat, which he had fastened to the bookcase with a thumb tack. From this pocket I drew an envelope containing all that was left of Austen's pawnable possessions, and I succeeded in getting the ticket for a fine suit of clothes which he had bought just before his illness. Then, having restored the envelope with the remainder of its contents, I departed hastily.

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After visiting the pawnbroker's and a little tailor's shop I called upon the art editor of one of our leading magazines, and, having justified my visit by some rather neat lying, I said to him: "Who's buying Harry Austen's stuff now?"

"Didn't know anybody was," he replied.

"You want to wake up," said I. "He's caught on."

"How do you mean?" said he.

"He's been doing some swell stuff," I replied, "and it isn't for sale. When I was in his studio this afternoon there was a man trying to induce him to sell a cover design—splendid thing it was, too—and Austen wouldn't let go."

"Did he say it was ordered?"

"No," said I. "He could sell it, but he won't. He's feeling pretty sure of himself these days. I shouldn't be surprised if your friends across the square were stocking up with some of his work."

"Tell him to come down here and see me," said the editor.

"He won't," said I. "He's got something else on his mind."

The editor drummed on his table and whistled softly. I was afraid to say a word more and instantly took my departure.

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his studio and nearly ran into my friend and art editor No. 1. They were going out to luncheon together on the A. E.'s treat, which he would subsequently work into an expensive bill. I dodged behind the elevator shaft and then followed cautiously. When I had trailed them to a restaurant, I ran over to get art editor No. 2 and brought him to that same chophouse.

"By jingo!" I whispered as we came in. "That accounts for it."

He looked across to where Austen and art editor No. 1 were sitting, and then he drew a long breath.

"I'm glad you put me on to this," he said. "Austen must be right in it. This is the first time in a year that I've seen him with his trousers pressed."

"I blessed myself for my visit to the pawnbroker and the little tailor and also thanked Providence that I had put a two dollar bill into the pocket of the trousers. Otherwise Austen might have pawned the suit again when the tailor brought it around to the studio."

About 5 o'clock that afternoon I dropped in upon Austen. He was smoking a good cigar and sketching a design in charcoal on a canvas.

He shut his teeth hard upon the cigar and looked at me with half shut eyes.

"Well, blast your bloomin' top lights, they didn't get it!" said he.

"Who didn't get what?" said I.

"I've had three of 'em here today," he responded. "Went to lunch with Harrison. Yes, yes; you were there. I forgot. Well, after lunch we came back here, and Harrison made another play for my valentine. Actually offered me cash, and he tried to find out what I was going to do with it. Didn't recognize the portrait. Thought I'd got a new model, confound him. After he was gone Jarbeau appeared. I think he'd been waiting around outside."

Jarbeau was the art editor whom I had taken to luncheon.

"I had a similar circus with him, except that he was sure that my picture was for Harrison," he continued.

"Well—a—well! He offered cash too. If I hadn't just eaten a full meal the temptation would have killed me."

"Good clothes sustain a man, too," said I, and he grinned at me.

"Markham was in later," said he. "He was very easy."

Markham was one of the men whom my emissary had seen.

"And you didn't sell?" I asked.

"Not for a million dollars. Sell her? I guess not. I agreed after considerable persuasion—and he grinned with great enjoyment—"to do something else for the gentlemen. They agreed to pay cash—because they thought I didn't need it, shiver their blasted timbers!"

"But the valentine goes," he added. "Nothing can stop that now. Heart of gold! The dross of this world cannot

buy my poor tribute which I shall lay at her feet. And a little—just a wee little bit—of hope will go with it now."

There was a moment's pause. Then he softly repeated the word "dross," which he had uttered with a fine scorn, and at the same time he put both hands into the side pockets of the coat which I had redeemed, and when he pulled them out they were full of money.

However, lest I should seem to be taking credit to myself for the success of a man now widely praised and greatly envied, let me explain that my little coup was nothing to the one which Austen himself achieved. I shudder to think what he would have lost if he had sold the valentine as I had planned.

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