

A Legal Tender Valentine

By WILLIS B. HAWKINS

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EDGAR WINSLOW, a stranger to most of the club diners, had been introduced by his friend, the toastmaster, as "our coming novelist" and had responded brilliantly to a trite sentiment. His was, beyond comparison, the speech of the evening, and nobody applauded it more enthusiastically than Mr. Barton, the banker. Later in the evening Mr. Barton sought an introduction and led Edgar to the reading room, where he might have him all to himself.

Winslow, mellowed by more wine than it was his custom to drink and tempted by the great banker's flattering interest, told much of his personal history and more of his ambition. He had really accomplished little as yet, he said—some short stories and a few verses in the magazines were the sum of his achievement—but he had long cherished the central idea of a novel which when written would, he hoped—It was profoundly impressive the way he modestly refrained from saying what he hoped.

Mr. Barton was more than ever under the spell of the young man's delightful enthusiasm—and the wine. Why was the great novel unwritten? The banker asked his suspicions. He asked shrewd questions, adroitly invited confidences and at last convinced himself. Then, having fixed a date when Edgar should dine with him and his family, he reluctantly let the interesting guest rejoin the general company.

An hour or so later the banker, hat in hand, bade Winslow good night, handing him a sealed envelope with the request that he "look over this manuscript" when he reached home.

In his little hall bedroom late that night Edgar opened the envelope and found \$500 in currency, accompanied by a friendly note which begged a thousand pardons, protested that the paltry loan was made in the interest of literature, expressed the hope that it would enable the author to write the great novel at once and assured him that Mr. Barton was his ardent admirer—Mr. Barton, it might have added, to some extent the wine.

To the credit of his good sense he said, Edgar did not deem himself insulted. If he felt a touch of mortification it was because he had invited this aid by talking too freely of his private affairs. But the circumstances, could he afford in the circumstances to accept the loan? He was shamefully in arrears to his kindly old landlady and knew that she needed money. There were other debts, too—a few small amounts advanced by friends who could ill afford such generosity. And then the chance to write the novel! He ended the controversy in his mind by resolving to send a promissory note to Mr. Barton, due on the 15th of the following February.

This seemed businesslike and, as he figured it, would give him time to write and dispose of the novel, for hope, you know, springs eternal in the literary breast, a fact which, by the way, is a great thing for literature.

Mr. Barton was a little ashamed of himself next morning. To be sure, the \$500 was a mere vest pocket amount, but the principle of the thing was the same. He had let his emotions get the better of him in a matter of money, and that was not business. Moreover,



WINSLOW AT THE BANKER'S HOME.

he had invited an impecunious young fellow to dine at his house, and there was no telling to what annoyances that indiscretion might lead.

If the banker was a bit cool in his welcome when Edgar came to the dinner the young man did not notice it. His attention was too much absorbed by the striking beauty of the daughter who stood beside her father. The meeting of their eyes was like the touch of two electrified wires. In that instant a spark was struck which time was to fan into raging flame. Mrs. Barton, too, soon yielded to the spell of Edgar's winsome ways and, despite the mild cautionings of her husband, opened the door of her home to the charming young author.

As usual in such cases, the head of the house was the foot of the class in

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point of knowledge as to what was going on. It was only when Mr. Barton's consent was asked as a sort of formal ratification that he learned how far matters had progressed. Then he put his foot down. Young Winslow was well enough in a way—a very pleasant fellow, in fact, for once in awhile—but—oh, well, he was not to be considered in any other light.

But he was considered, and amid copious tears at that.

"Why, my child," the banker said, softening under his daughter's grief, "he hasn't a dollar to his name. He can't even manage for one, to say nothing of two. He is living at this moment on borrowed capital, with no reasonable hope of being able to pay it back."

"Oh, yes, he has," Alivia answered confidently. "I know all about that \$500, and you were a dear, good papa to let him have it. He'll pay it back, you'll see, and with good interest. Just wait till his novel comes out. Oh, papa, if you only knew how grateful he is to you!"

"Grateful or ungrateful, my dear," said Mr. Barton, "I don't believe he will ever pay it. How many of the novels written ever see daylight? Not one in a thousand. And of those that are published not one in a hundred yields anything for the author."

"But Edgar is different," the daughter persisted. "I am sure it will succeed. Oh, I wish you could hear him read it! You would say so yourself."

She regaled her father with portions of it that she had learned by heart, literally by heart. And her beautiful trust in the conquering power of the man she loved warmed Mr. Barton even more than the wine at the club dinner had done. To avoid being led to do something sentimentally foolish again he went away to think alone. And the wise result of his meditations was that he must convince his daughter rather than rule her against her convictions.

Winslow's note would be due in less than a month, and the banker knew enough of the situation to believe that it would not be paid at maturity. If it were not, then Alivia herself might see the matter in a more reasonable light. At any rate, she would be likely to accept the compromise of postponement. And there was hope in even that.

It was St. Valentine's day, but Edgar Winslow, standing in the morning by his hall bedroom window, was thinking of something more important than paper hearts. For weeks he had waited in painful anxiety for the verdict of the publisher to whom he had submitted his novel. Day after day he had watched the postman come and go, leaving nothing for him. On the 10th of February he had written an urgent letter to the publisher begging him to render his decision before the 15th, "for," thought he, "with the book accepted I can raise money on my prospects, and Mr. Barton must be promptly paid." Now it was the 14th, and still no answer had come.

A trilling whistle sounded somewhere up the street. Edgar raised his sash and leaned out at the window. Yes, the postman was coming his way. Would he pass? No; he turned in and rang the basement bell. The young author closed the window and hastened to the head of the stairs. The housemaid was coming up. How slowly she plodded! Winslow ran down to meet her, calling over the banister, "Anything for me, Mary?"

"Yes, Mr. Winslow, you an' me is the only ones that got valentines, I guess. Look!" She had taken a gaudy "comic" from the envelope addressed to herself and was studying the verse beneath the hideous picture.

Edgar, all impatience, took the two letters addressed to him and, with a kindly word to Mary, sprang joyously up the stairs and shut himself in his room. With trembling fingers he tore open the envelope bearing the publisher's return card. The letter was short and to the point. The manuscript, the publisher regretted to say, was "not available." It would be returned by express that day.

For a long time Edgar stood looking vacantly out at the deserted street, with its deep drifts of snow, from which fitful gusts of wind swept up thin white clouds and hurled them hissing here and there. But the desolation in his breast was bleaker than that of the scene outside. He had done his best and failed. That was the deadening thought. He had put his very soul into this story—yes, and more; he had put somewhat of Alivia's beautiful soul into it, for ever since he had known her she had been not only his inspiration, but also the unconscious model of all that was lovely in his feminine creations. True, the limitations of language had confined him to the merest suggestion of those finer feelings to which he thrilled as he wrote, but he had done his best, and under the most favorable conditions possible. If this story was not worthy of publication he could not hope ever to write one that would be.

And Alivia! Was it farewell to her also? From the depths of his despair he tried to look the situation honestly in the face. Must she not now lose her confidence in his power to win the world, that simple, joyous confidence which had encouraged him sometimes to feel such boundless power within himself? Must she not now take him from the lofty pedestal on which her love had placed him? If so, then his life was not worth living, since its one great purpose for months had been to acquire, indeed, that nobleness of character which she in her sweet, unquestioning faith had ascribed to him.

In that hour of overwhelming distress he had forgotten the other letter. Now, however, he began tearing it open listlessly. Nothing, he thought, that anybody might have to say to him in a typewritten communication could be of the slightest interest now. Yet in the next moment he stood with a \$500

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bill in one hand, a plain leaf of paper bearing two typewritten lines in the other and a multitude of struggling emotions in his breast. Through a gathering mist in his eyes he read the two lines:

A friend who is not expert at rhyme
Begs you to accept this valentine.

To his mind there was something pathetic in the wretched lack of rhyme and rhythm, for it indicated to him only an innocent attempt of one unpracticed in the ways of deceit to conceal her identity. "God bless her!" he murmured fervently, kissing the page. "She shall never know how pitifully her little subterfuge has failed."

He spent the rest of the forenoon writing a long letter to Alivia. This was easier than to confess himself a failure to her face. He told her that some kind anonymous friend had sent money enough to enable him to pay his debt to her father, but that he must now cast about for employment. As for literature, that sweet dream was over.

Early next morning a messenger brought a hastily written note in which Alivia told him to be sure to call that evening and bring his manuscript. "Papa wants to hear it," she said.

When Edgar paid his debt at the bank that day Mr. Barton added his



"BY GEORGE!" HE EXCLAIMED.

testimony to his daughter's, saying: "Come to dinner. Then we can get at the reading earlier."

In the library that evening the banker, with a good cigar between his teeth, leaned back in his great morocco chair and put an arm about Alivia, who sat on a hassock close beside him.

As Edgar, reading deeper and deeper into his story, began to feel the pleasure he had known in writing it his embarrassment departed, and his voice became rich with that melodious quality which had first attracted Mr. Barton at the club dinner. Then the scenes depicted, the characters brought out, the noble thoughts that strode through the tale, were all the more majestic because clothed in the garb of simple, unobtrusive language.

Mr. Barton's cigar had gone out. He leaned forward tensely. He was more than interested; he was fascinated. "By George!" he exclaimed as the reader rounded a climax. "Great! That's great!"

Edgar laid the manuscript aside. "Go on," said the banker eagerly. "Please go on, Mr. Winslow," Mrs. Barton added, with equal earnestness. Alivia's bright eyes danced with the pleasure of pride.

The end of it was that Edgar read until after midnight, then left the manuscript with Mr. Barton, who said he could not go to sleep until he had learned how it all came out.

The next afternoon the banker met the head of the publishing house by telephonic appointment.

"Do you ever read manuscripts yourself?" Mr. Barton asked.

"Not often. Only in very special cases," the publisher answered.

"Well," said the banker, "this is a very special case. I wish you would read this one at once and send a bill to me for your trouble."

In two days the publisher called at the bank. There was no bill, he said. On the contrary, the obligation was on his side, and he should like to make arrangements for bringing out the book at once.

"Do you know that your house rejected this manuscript day before yesterday?"

"Yes, I learned so this morning. The author seemed to be in unreasonable haste, and it was sent back without reading."

A few months later, when Edgar's fortune was assured, the banker listened to his plea and, with a merry twinkle in his eye, answered: "No, sir. You can't have her until you've paid back that five hundred."

"What five hundred?"

"The valentine I sent you."

"You, Mr. Barton?"

"Yes, sir, to be brutally frank about it, I wanted to see whether you were one of those geniuses who don't pay their debts when they have the money. Now, honor bright, Edgar, how much did you have left after you took up that note?"

"About \$2."

"And no prospect of any more. Hanged if I think I'd have had the nerve to pay it under those conditions."

"Nor I, perhaps," said Edgar, "if you had been anybody but Alivia's father."

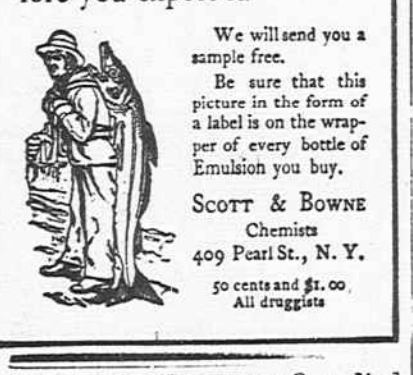
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Sometimes the ignorant speak truer than they think. An old gentleman told me that his daughter at college belonged to one of them Greek letter societies, the "Gabble Gabble Cackle." On inquiry I learned that he meant the 'Kappa Kappa Gamma.

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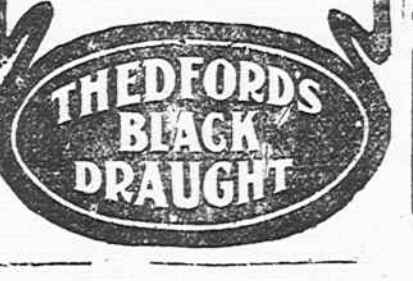
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Wright Goings.

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SAML. S. BOYLSTON,
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