Alias Jimmy Valentine
By: O. Henry

A guard came to the prison show shop, where Jimmy Valentine had been working for the ten months of his stay.

“Warden wants you in the front office,” said the guard, taking Jimmy’s arm. “Looks like you’ve got your pardon from the governor.

“About time,” said Jimmy.

A man with as many friends “on the outside” as Jimmy Valentine had was never in prison for long. Ten months was the most time he’d ever done.

The Warden didn’t hand him the pardon right away. As always, he gave him strong words of advice first.

“You’ll go out in the morning, Valentine, and this time I have you to make an honest man of yourself. You’re not a bad fellow at heart. Just stop cracking safes, and go straight.”


The warden laughed.

“Oh no. Of course not. Then how come you got sent up on that Springfield job? Was it just a mean old jury that had it in for you?”

“Me?” Jimmy kept on looking surprised. “Why, warden, I never was in Springfield in al my life!”

“Take him back, guard,” said the warden, “and fix him up wit a new suit and shoes. Have him in my office at seven in the morning. And Valentine: better think over my advice.”

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At quarter past seven next morning, Jimmy stood in the warden’s office. He had on a cheap, shiny, badly fitting suit. On his feet were stiff, squeaky shoes.

The warden gave him a railroad ticket, a five-dollar bill, a cheap cigar, and a handshake. He also gave him yesterday’s advice all over again, and wished him luck.

Mr. James Valentine, no longer Prisoner Number 9762, walked out into the sunshine.

Not even glancing at the trees, the birds, the flowers, Jimmy went right to the nearest restaurant and had the biggest breakfast he’d had in ten months. He finished it off with a far better cigar than the warden had given him.

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Then he walked to the railroad station and boarded a train.
Within three hours, he was in a little town near the state line. He went at once to a bar owned by an old pal, Mike Dolan. The two shook hands.

“Sorry we couldn’t make it sooner, Jimmy,” said Mike, “but the governor was a tough one. How are you?”

“Fine,” said Jimmy. “Got my key?”
He got his key and went upstairs, unlocking the door of a room at the rear.
Everything was just as he had left it, even the collar button on the floor, the one he had yanked from the shirt of Detective Ben Price, the man who had come to arrest him.

From the back of the closet, Jimmy pulled his dusty old suitcase. He opened it and stood staring happily at the finest set of safecracker’s tools anywhere in the Midwest.

There were drills, punches, clamps, even a few special pieces designed by Jimmy himself. The whole set was worth nearly a thousand dollars.

When he went downstairs again, Jimmy was dressed in a handsome, well-fitting suit. He was carrying his cleaned, dusted suitcase.

“What’s up this time, Jimmy?” Mike wanted to know “Got anything in mind?”

“Me?” Jimmy looked surprised. “Just off to do an honest day’s work, Mike. I’m the new sales manager for the finest cookie and biscuit company in the Midwest.”

Mike laughed so hard he nearly dropped the glass he was drying.”

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A week after the release of Prisoner Number 9762, three safe burglaries were reported to the police. Not a clue was left to any of them, except that they were all done in the same manner.

“That’s Jimmy Valentine,” declared Ben Price.

He knew Jimmy’s habits. The jobs were clean, neat, easy. No trace of the burglar was ever left behind.

“He’ll no his full sentence this time,” vowed Ben. “No more pardons for Jimmy Valentine!”

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One afternoon, Jimmy climbed off the train in an small town called Elmore, carrying his heavy suitcase. He looked so handsome in his fine new suit, he might have been a college student home for a visit.

A lovely young lady crossed the street, passed him a the corner, and walked up the steps of the Elmore Bank.

Jimmy Valentine took one look at her, forgot who he was, and became a new man.

Shyly, the young lady returned his glance. Young men of Jimmy’s style and good looks were scarce in Elmore. Then she looked quickly away and hurried into the bank.

A little boy was loafing on the steps. Jimmy tossed him a dime.

“Beg pardon,” he said, “but wasn’t that, um, Miss Polly Simpson that just went into the bank?”

“Nope,” said the boy, “but I know who it is. Got another dime?”

Three dimes later, Jimmy found out that the lady was Miss Annabel Adams. Three more dimes and he knew that she was the bank owner’s daughter.

Jimmy Valentine, the new man, needed a new name. At the local hotel, he signed in as Mr. Ralph D. Spencer.

He also needed a new means of earning a living. There was only one thing he knew as much about as safecracking.

“I’m planning to settle in Elmore,” he told the hotel clerk. “I was thinking about opening a shoe store. Are there any others in town?”
“Not a one,” said the clerk. “We could really use a good shoe store. I’m sure you’ll be a success, Mr. Spencer.

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Mr. Spencer was a success. The shoe store did well from the start, as did its handsome and charming owner. Soon he had many friends in Elmore. Among those was Miss Annabel Adams.

At the end of a year, the two were engaged to be married. Mr. Ralph D. Spencer was warmly welcomed into the Adams family.

One day Jimmy sat down and wrote a letter to an old friend in St. Louis.

“Dear Billy,” the letter read, “I have a gift for you. I want you to have my kit of tools. I have no need for them now. I’m going to marry the finest girl in the world in two weeks. She believes in me, Billy, and I wouldn’t do another crooked thing for the world. Meet me in Sully’s Bar on Tuesday night. I’ll have the tools with me. Your old pal, Jimmy.”

On the very day he wrote this letter, Ben Price came to Elmore. From the drugstore across the street from Spencer’s Shoe Store, he got a good look at its owner, Mr. Ralph D. Spencer.

“Aha!” said Ben to himself. “Marry the banker’s daughter, will you, Jimmy Valentine? We’ll see about that!”

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On Tuesday morning, when Jimmy was to leave for St. Louis, Annabel’s father asked him to stop off at the bank for a moment, along with the rest of the Adams family. He wanted to show off to them all his brand-new bank vault.

They were a large, happy party: Annabel, her married sister and two small daughters, Mr. Ralph D. Spencer, and Mr. Adams.

Laughing and talking as they went into the bank, they didn’t notice Ben Price. His back was turned to them, he was leaning against a wall outside the room they were entering.

The shiny new vault was a marvel, with a time-lock that had to be turned this way and that to make the heavy door close.

Since the vault was no yet in use, the door stood open now. The little girls were more interested than anybody. They looked inside, listening and watching as Mr. Adams explained its workings.

And then, all in a moment, the bigger girl playfully pushed her little sister inside and slammed the door shut. She turned the knob, just as she had seen Mr. Adams do. Then she smiled, proud of what she had done.

Inside the vault, her sister screamed in terror.

Mr. Adams was terrified, too. So were the child’s mother and everyone else in the room.

“I can’t open the door!” cried Mr. Adams, pulling at the handle just the same. “The time-lock hasn’t been set yet! There isn’t a man nearer than a hundred miles from here who can do it! And there isn’t much air in that vault!”

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“Oh, Ralph!” Suddenly Annabel was pulling at the sleeve of the man she loved, certain that he, above all men on earth, would be the one to perform a miracle. “Oh, Ralph, isn’t there something you can do?”
He looked at here with a strange smile on his lips. All at once, Mr. Ralph D. Spencer was gone from the room. In his place stood Jimmy Valentine.

In a flash, he threw off his coat. Then he set his heavy suitcase on a table and opened it. He took out his tools, one by one, and set them out.

Then he went silently to work. In a minute his pet drill was biting into the heavy door. Within a few minutes more, breaking his own speed record, Jimmy opened the door.

The frightened child, unharmed, fell into her mother’s arms.

Jimmy Valentine put on his coat, packed up his tools, and walked to the front door. Ah he went, he thought he heard a faraway voice that he once knew calling out “Ralph! Oh, Ralph!” but he never stopped walking.

At the door, a big man stood in his way.

“Hello, Ben,” said Jimmy, still smiling his odd, sad smile.

“Here at last, are you? Well let’s go. Can’t see that it makes much difference now.”

And then Ben Price did a strange thing.

“You must be mistaken, sir. I don’t believe I know you.”

Without another look, he turned away and strolled down the street.

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O’Question Sheet:

Complete the following questions in a new word processing document and save it in your personal folder (not on the desktop). Lost files will not receive marks, so I would recommend saving it on a USB key or e-mailing your answers to yourself in case of a problem.

1) Summarize the end of the story, from the time the girls were locked up in the bank vault in 2-3 sentences.

2) Were you surprised to read about Jimmy’s interaction with Detective Ben Price at the end? Explain why you were or were not surprised, using details from the story to support your opinion.

3) Identify each of the following parts of this short story using complete sentences to describe each point in the story and why it relates to the particular element you have identified:
   1. Exposition
   2. Rising Action
   3. Climax
   4. Falling Action
   5. Resolution

4) Do you think that people can really change? If no, why not, and if yes, why? Defend your answer with evidence from the short story and from your life. Please respond in paragraph form.