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**A Retrieved Reformation (Part 1)** by O. Henry

In the prison shoe-shop, prisoner Jimmy Valentine was busily at work making shoes. A prison officer came into the shop and handed Jimmy an important paper. It said that he was going to be released from prison the next day.

Jimmy was a professional burglar and master safe-cracker. A year ago, he'd been caught by a clever police detective named Ben Price and sentenced to four years in the state penitentiary.

Jimmy had been in prison for just ten months; he had hoped to be there for less than three. He had important friends outside the prison. And back in Jimmy's day, a man with the right friends did not expect to stay in prison long. He could always count on a bribe to get him an early release.

So, at a quarter past seven the next morning, Jimmy Valentine stood in the prison office a free man. He had on some new clothes that didn't fit him, and a pair of new shoes that hurt his feet. These were the usual clothes given to a prisoner when he left the prison.

Next, they gave him money to pay for his trip on a train to the city nearest the prison. They gave him five dollars more. The five dollars were supposed to help him start a new life and become a better person.

Then the chief prison officer put out his hand for a handshake. That was the end of Valentine, Prisoner 9762. Mr. James Valentine walked out into the sunshine.

He did not listen to the song of the birds or look at the green trees or smell the flowers. He went straight to a restaurant and had a good dinner. After that he went to the train station and boarded a train.

Three hours later, he got off the train in a small town. Here he went to the home of his old friend, Mike Dolan. Mike Dolan was there alone. "Glad to see you're out Jimmy," said Mike. "Sorry we couldn't arrange it sooner. It took a bit more doing this time than it usually does."

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Jimmy went upstairs and opened the door of a room at the back of the house. Everything was as he had left it. Hidden behind the bed, was a small door in the wall. He opened it and pulled out a dust-covered suitcase. Inside the suitcase was the finest set of safe-cracking tools in the country—some of them specially designed by Jimmy himself. He had paid over nine hundred dollars for the set.

A week after Jimmy was released from prison, there was a safe-cracking in Richmond, Indiana. Eight hundred dollars were stolen. Two weeks later, a new, improved, burglar-proof safe in Logansport was opened, and fifteen hundred dollars were missing. Then, an old-fashioned bank-safe in Jefferson City was broken into and five thousand dollars were gone.

The police were called in to investigate, and Ben Price took on the case. "This is Valentine's work," mused Price. "It looks like Dandy Jimmy's back in business again. Yes, I want you, Mr. Valentine. And this time, you'll serve out your full sentence. No more of that 'early release' foolishness."

People with safes full of money were much relieved to hear that Detective Price was after Jimmy. But Price knew that Jimmy wouldn't be easy to find. Jimmy was constantly hopping from one city to another. He worked alone, and he always skipped town as soon as he'd finished a job.

*To be continued . . .*