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A Retrieved Reformation (Part 3) by O. Henry

On Wednesday, Jimmy breakfasted with the Adamses. He was on his way to Little Rock to order his wedding suit and buy a wedding present for Annabel. He had with him the suitcase of tools that he was bringing to his friend. It had been more than a year now since Jimmy's last 'professional job', and he was feeling pretty good about himself.

After breakfast, the family planned to walk downtown. The Elmore bank had just put in a new safe, and everyone wanted to see it. Mr. Adams was eager to show it off and insisted that Jimmy come along.

It was quite the little party that set out to inspect the safe: Annabel's parents, Annabel, Annabel's married sister with her two little girls, aged five and seven, and Jimmy with his suitcase.

"Why, what's in your bag, Ralph?" asked Annabel, noticing Jimmy's suitcase for the first time. "You're not staying the night in Little Rock, are you?"

"No. I...I'm not staying over," answered Jimmy. "I...uh...I've got some merchandise I need to return to Little Rock. Just thought I'd bring it along and save the freight charge."

The bank's new safe was truly impressive. It was as large as a small room, and it had a very special door. The door was controlled by a clock. Using the clock, the banker planned the time when the door should open. At other times no one—not even the banker himself—could open it.

The two children, May and Agatha, were delighted by the safe's shining metal door with its funny clock and knobs. And Mr. Adams enjoyed explaining how it all worked to Mr. Spenser, who pretended to know nothing at all about safes.

While the family was busy admiring the safe, Ben Price sauntered into the bank and casually wandered around. He told the bank-teller that he didn't want anything; he was just waiting for a man he knew.

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Suddenly, there was a scream from Annabel's sister. While no one was watching, May—Annabel's seven-year-old niece—had playfully but firmly closed the door of the safe with her little sister Agatha inside.

Mr. Adams rushed to the door of safe and tugged at the handle for a moment. "The door can't be opened," he groaned. "The clock hasn't been wound, nor the combination set."

Agatha's mother screamed again, and from behind the thick door they could hear the muffled cry of the little girl.

"My precious darling," sobbed the mother. " She'll die in there. There isn't enough air. Open the door! Break it open! Can't you men do something?"

Annabel turned to Jimmy, her large eyes full of pain. "Is there nothing to be done, Ralph? Try, won't you?"

He looked at her with a soft, sad smile on his lips.

"Annabel," he said, "give me that rose you're wearing, will you?"

Surprised, she unpinned the flower from her dress and handed it to him. He stuffed it into his vest-pocket, threw off his coat and pulled up his shirt-sleeves. With that act, Ralph D. Spencer passed away, and Jimmy Valentine took his place.

"Stand away from the door, all of you," he commanded.

He put his suitcase on the table and opened it flat. From that time on, he seemed not to know that anyone else was near. Quickly he laid the strange, shiny tools on the table, whistling softly to himself as he always did when at work. The others watched him as if under a spell.

Within a minute, Jimmy was drilling into the steel door. In ten minutes—faster than he had ever done it before—he had the door open, and Agatha, badly shaken but safe, was gathered into her mother's arms.

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Jimmy Valentine put on his coat and walked to the front door. As he went he heard a far-away voice that he once knew call "Ralph!" But he never hesitated.

At the door, a big man stood blocking the way.

"Why, hello, Ben!" said Jimmy, with a strange smile. "Found me at last, have you? Well, let's go. I don't know that it makes much difference now."

And then Ben Price acted rather oddly.

"Guess you're mistaken, Mr. Spencer," he said. "Don't believe I recognize you."

And Ben Price turned away and strolled down the street.

THE END