

A Retrieved Reformation

SCENE 1

A PRISON, 1920

N1: Jimmy Valentine had been sentenced to four years in the state penitentiary for cracking safes.

N2: In this era, however, career criminals with a few connections could always count on bribes to get them an early release.

N1: A guard enters the prison shoe shop, where inmates are hunched over machines, stitching shoes.

N2: The guard escorts inmate No. 9762 to the warden.

WARDEN: I don't know how you managed it, Jimmy Valentine, but you've been pardoned by the governor.

JIMMY: It's about time. I've been here for 10 months already.

WARDEN: And now you have a chance to make a man of yourself, Jimmy. You're not a bad fellow at heart. Stop cracking safes and live straight.

JIMMY: Me? Why, I never cracked a safe in my life.

WARDEN: Of course not. So how was it you got sent to prison for that Springfield job then?

JIMMY: Me? Why, I never was in Springfield in my life!

WARDEN: Better think over my advice, Jimmy.

N1: The warden hands Jimmy a train ticket and a five-dollar bill.

N2: Mr. James Valentine walks away a free man.



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SCENE 2

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

N1: Jimmy arrives at the house of his old friend, Mike Dolan.

DOLAN: Sorry we couldn't get you out sooner. Folks were squawkin' so loud down in Springfield, the governor needed extra persuading.

N2: Jimmy goes upstairs. He slides back a panel in the wall and drags out a dust-covered suitcase.

N1: He opens the bag and gazes fondly at the finest burglar's tools in the East.

N2: He reappears downstairs, carrying his suitcase and wearing a rose in his vest pocket. He always wears a rose when he's living the criminal life.

DOLAN: (seeing the rose): Another job planned already? You just got out of prison!

JIMMY: Me? I don't understand your meaning. As far as anyone knows, I am a salesman for the New York Wheat Biscuit Company.

DOLAN (laughing): Sure you are, Jimmy. Sure you are.

SCENE 3

DETECTIVE PRICE'S OFFICE

N1: Lieutenant Porter hands the detective a report.

PORTER: Detective Price, I think you should see this. Jimmy Valentine got himself another pardon.

PRICE: I saw it.

PORTER: Well, there's been a rash of safecracking jobs since he got out of prison: Eight hundred dollars was stolen from a safe in Richmond, \$1,500 from a vault in Logansport.

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PRICE: That's small change for Jimmy.

PORTER: How about a cool five grand lifted from a so-called burglar-proof safe in Jefferson City?

PRICE: We'd better get down there and investigate.

N2: When Ben Price arrives in Jefferson City, he immediately recognizes Jimmy's handiwork.

PRICE: This is Jimmy's work, all right. Look at that combination knob-- jerked out as easy as pulling up a radish. He's got the only tools that can do it. And look how clean those tumblers were punched out!

PORTER: Safe-owners will rest easy knowing you're on the case, sir.

SCENE 4

ELMORE, ARKANSAS

N1: A sharply dressed Jimmy Valentine arrives in Elmore. He has plans to rob the bank there.

N2: As he heads to his hotel, a beautiful young lady passes by.

N1: Jimmy looks into her eyes. Just like that, he falls hopelessly in love.

N2: The woman blushes when she notices Jimmy. After all, men of Jimmy's style are scarce in Elmore.

N1: Jimmy forgets his criminal past and instantly becomes a new man.

N2: He talks to a boy loafing nearby, cleverly working him for information.

JIMMY: Isn't that young lady Polly Simpson?

BOY: Nope. That's Annabel Adams. Her pa owns the bank.

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JIMMY: Is that so? She married?

BOY: Not yet.

N1: Jimmy goes to his hotel.

JIMMY: I'd like a room, please. The name's Spencer—Ralph D. Spencer.

CLERK: What brings you to Elmore, Mr. Spencer?

JIMMY: I'm lookin' to go into business. How's the shoe business around here?

N2: The clerk is impressed by Jimmy's fancy suit and good manners.

CLERK: There ought to be plenty of opportunity. There isn't an exclusive shoe store in all of Elmore.

JIMMY: Business good in town?

CLERK: Why, sure. I think you'll find it a pleasant place to live, too.

JIMMY: Well, I'll stay a few days and look it over.

CLERK: Let me get your bag.

JIMMY: Thanks, but I'll carry it myself. It's rather heavy.

N1: And so Mr. Ralph Spencer rises from Jimmy Valentine's ashes—ashes left by the flame of a sudden love.

SCENE 5

ELMORE, ARKANSAS

N2: Over the next year, Jimmy opens a shoe store, becomes prosperous, and works hard to become a pillar of Elmore society.

N1: He and Annabel get engaged.

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N2: Two weeks before the wedding, Jimmy writes a letter.

JIMMY (writing): Dear Old Pal, I want you to meet me in Little Rock so that I may give you my bag of tools. I'm making an honest living now. I'm going to marry the finest girl on Earth. The straight life is the only way. She believes in me, Mike. I wouldn't do another crooked thing for the whole world...

N1: A few days later, Detective Ben Price arrives in Elmore. He has been searching for Jimmy all this time.

PRICE: Say, who's that sharply dressed gentleman over there?

BOY: Why, that's Mr. Spencer. He owns the shoe store.

PRICE: You don't say?

BOY: He's engaged to marry Miss Annabel, the banker's daughter.

PRICE: Going to marry the banker's daughter, is he? Well, I'm not so sure about that.

SCENE 6

THE FIRST BANK OF ELMORE

N2: Before leaving for Little Rock, where he will pick up his wedding tuxedo and deliver his tools to Mike, Jimmy stops by the bank to see Annabel and her family.

N1: Annabel, her sister Matilda and Matilda's two little girls, May and Agatha, are all there. They've come to see the bank's new vault.

ANNABEL: My, Ralph, that's quite a bag! It looks heavy, and you're holding on to it like it's full of gold. Whatever have you got in there, darling?

JIMMY: Uh, there are a lot of nickel-plated shoehorns in there. I'm going to return them while I'm in Little Rock. I'm on my way to the train station now.

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ADAMS: Before you go, you must come see the new vault. We've just had it installed!

ANNABEL: It's very impressive. Daddy says it's practically burglar proof.

N1: Mr. Adams proudly explains how the vault works.

MAY (Annabel's niece): It's so shiny!

ADAMS: It has a new, patented door.

AGATHA (May's little sister): What a funny clock it has!

ADAMS: That's the time lock.

MAY: And look at all the knobs.

ADAMS: It fastens with three solid-steel bolts thrown by a single twist of the handle.

N2: Meanwhile, Ben Price has been leaning against the bank counter, casually watching Jimmy between the railings.

TELLER: Can I help you, sir?

PRICE: Just waiting for a man I know.

N1: Suddenly, there's a scream.

ANNABEL: Oh, no! One of the girls has gotten locked inside the vault!

MAY: I didn't mean to shut Agatha inside! I didn't think it would lock!

N2: Adams tugs at the handle.

ADAMS: It can't be opened. The combination hasn't been set.

MATILDA (Annabel's sister): Oh, my poor baby! My sweet little girl!

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ADAMS: Hush! Be quiet a moment.

N1: He puts his ear to the safe.

ADAMS (yelling): Agatha! Can you hear me?

N2: They all hear the faint sound of wild shrieking.

MATILDA: My little darling! Open the door! Oh, break it open! Can't you do something?

ADAMS: There isn't anyone in Elmore who can open it. What shall we do? That child can't stand it long in there. She'll run out of air!

N1: Matilda pounds helplessly on the vault.

TELLER: What about dynamite?

ADAMS: The vault is too strong.

N2: Annabel turns to Jimmy, her large eyes full of anguish.

ANNABEL: We must do something! Try, won't you, Ralph?

N1: After glancing toward the front counter, Jimmy gives Annabel a bittersweet smile.

JIMMY: Annabel, give me the rose you're wearing, will you?

N2: Jimmy stuffs the rose in his vest pocket and throws off his coat.

N1: He's no longer Ralph Spencer. Jimmy Valentine has returned.

JIMMY: Get away from the door, all of you.

N2: He opens his suitcase and takes out his shining instruments, whistling softly to himself--just as he always did while safecracking.

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N1: The others watch him as if under a spell.

N2: In a minute, Jimmy's drill bites smoothly into the steel door. In 10 minutes--breaking his own record--he throws back the bolts.

MATILDA: Oh, Agatha! My precious!

AGATHA: Mommy! Mommy!

N1: Jimmy puts on his coat and walks directly toward Ben Price.

ANNABEL: Ralph!

JIMMY: Hello, Ben. Found me at last, have you? Well, let's go. I don't know that it makes much difference now.

N2: Ben Price looks at Jimmy strangely.

PRICE: Guess you're mistaken, Mr. Spencer. Don't believe I recognize you.

N1: And then Ben Price turns, leaves the bank, and strolls down the street.

THE END