

"Alias Jimmy Valentine"

Novelized by
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 From the Great
 Play by
PAUL ARMSTRONG

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CHAPTER X.

ROSE greeted Valentine pleasantly, the blush in her fresh young cheeks equaling the pink of the roses in her hat. She thanked him for awaiting her return, and she and her father seated themselves on the sofa, the ex-convict standing before them.

It was Mr. Lane who began to lead the conversation to a serious point.

"Mr. Randall—my daughter tells me that is the name you gave her."

"That is my name, sir."

"Well, Mr. Randall, I am not going to ask questions. I presume no one wishes to forget the past more than you. I am going to explain a situation to you and offer you employment."

"While I thank you I could not accept any position at your hands or your daughter's," answered Valentine. "It is better that I started without assistance and procured employment with total strangers."

"But, Mr. Randall," began the girl. The father continued:

"I think you are wrong, Mr. Randall. I understand perfectly the spirit which prompts you to take this stand. Still, I think you are wrong. Won't you let me explain fully?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"First we know or think we know the one thing against you. We believe, while knowing this, that you are trustworthy. I am the president of the Fourth National bank of Springfield, Massachusetts?"

exclaimed Valentine excitedly and turning away his face to hide the signs of the shock the name gave him.

"No; Illinois," responded the banker. A relieved expression came over Valentine's face.

"I own 30 per cent of the stock, my daughter 40," resumed the banker. "It is her wish, to which I assent, that I take you into the bank as an employee."

Valentine could hardly believe that he was hearing aright. That a banker should offer a newly released convict a position in his establishment was astounding.

"But, Mr. Lane"—he began protestingly. But Mr. Lane again spoke.

"One moment, please. You will get a rather small salary to begin with, but as you learn the business—I understand you are an accountant?"

"I was for a time—yes, sir."

"That will make your advancement rapid, presuming, of course"—The banker raised his eyes significantly.

"I understand, sir."

Rose leaned forward eagerly.

"And, don't you see, in a year or two"—she began, but her father interrupted.

"And this also I wish you to consider, Mr. Randall: In this position your past cannot affect you. I mean by that, since we know all, only your future concerns us."

"You are very generous, but"—

Rose again addressed Valentine.

"Won't you in some way allow us the chance to repay the kindness you once did me? I want you to come. You accept?"

The other considered for a moment. Finally he made up his mind.

"With the deepest thanks," he replied feelingly.

"We are leaving now. I shall expect you to report when?" asked the father.

"Within a week."

"That is entirely satisfactory."

Rose arose with her father and stepped close to Valentine, extending a dainty gloved hand.

"I shall look forward to seeing you," she said in a low voice.

The ex-prisoner gazed steadily into her eyes.

"I can only thank you," he murmured.

"Goodby, sir, until next week," spoke the banker.

"I shall try my best to make you glad of this," responded Valentine, his manner evidencing the gratefulness that welled within him as well as the earnestness of his desire to build anew the life that he had so nearly wrecked.

Father and daughter stepped to the entrance, leaving Jimmy Valentine standing in the middle of the hotel parlor. Half dazed by his good fortune, he gazed after them.

The banker hesitated a moment.

"I believe you, sir," turning toward Valentine. "I believe we shall never regret what we have done."

Rose also had a last word for her hero. She grasped her father's arm and said enthusiastically: "That is just how I feel, too, and—er"—she was becoming embarrassed—"Spring-

field is a beautiful city, Mr. Randall," she managed to end.

They were gone. Valentine sprang to the entrance and peered after them from between the portieres. A fleeting vision of a sweet young girl's face, smiling and confident, was his reward as Rose Lane walked out into the corridor. He stood and stared even when father and daughter had gone from sight, his eyes fixed on the point where the girl had disappeared.

And he was still standing in the same position when, Ned Flanagan, who had noticed the cessation of the conversation, stole quietly back into the room. He saw and understood his plunge into the abyssal underworld, where might makes right and where might makes wrong, had not yet dulled entirely his knowledge of some of the finer emotions that impel mankind to various courses of action.

He smiled. "He's hopeless. He's got 'square for keeps," he murmured. He diplomatically coughed.

Valentine wheeled about.

"Here, Red," he cried, "from now on we go straight. I've got my chance." He caught Red by both shoulders and shook him violently in his overwhelming joy.

"By right. But what do I do?" was the gasping response of Red, almost carried off his feet by the enthusiastic nature of Valentine's greeting.

"You trail along, Red, with me. Get a job in my town for a year, and by that time I'll have one for you."

"Doing what?"

Valentine buried at his brother safe-breaking expert a reply that caused him to stand speechless in amazement. Jaws distended almost to the point of dislocation and with eyes that threatened momentarily to bulge entirely out of their sockets.

"I'm going to make you watchman in a national bank," was the cool response of Jimmy Valentine.

One bright winter afternoon, three years after the day Jimmy Valentine began to "go it straight," a young

boy, attired in black velvet knickerbockers, turned the knob of the door of the private office of the assistant cashier of the Fourth National bank of Springfield, Ill. Barely eleven years old, Bobby Lane considered it the rarest treat of his life to be allowed a chance to invade this usually busy office and to play at being a banker.

The large office had two entrances, one leading into the hall of the large building and another leading into the tiled inclosure in which was being built a spacious new vault. In the middle of the room was a large mahogany desk. Near the hall door and close to the wall was a small mahogany writing table. Three or four comfortable chairs were scattered about the room.

On the glass of the hall door, glazed halfway to the top, was the inscription in trim black letters, "Lee Randall, Assistant Cashier."

And so it was with Lee Randall, alias Jimmy Valentine, that Bobby Lane, the banker's little son, was fond of romping away his (Bobby's) idle hours and with whom he frequently enacted the role of an austere, uncompromising banker.

Very much the same Jimmy Valentine in appearance and manner. Mr. Randall had scored a signal success as assistant cashier, and neither Mr. Lane nor any other official or director had found in the three years occasion for the slightest adverse criticism of the new employee. In fact, he was deemed to be a most valuable acquisition to the executive staff of the bank and had evidenced unusual capacity as a detector of counterfeit notes and of forged signatures on negotiable instruments. Yes, the assistant cashier was a man with a future of promise in store for him, and the Fourth National of Springfield had but a month before offered him the position of cashier, with a thousand dollars a year increase over his present salary. Not one official of the Fourth National could give a satisfactory reason for his refusal of the offer. "Very remarkable young man, very," was the comment of the president of the Fourth National when notified of the episode.

"Hurrah! Nobody in the office!" exclaimed Bobby to his sister Kitty, who followed him into the room.

The children, prime favorites with the assistant cashier, were accustomed to do very much as they pleased with him or with his office at this late hour in the day, when business with the public had practically concluded. Almost the only remaining thing for him to do was to attend to certain routine matters connected with the closing of the bank's business for the day.

"Come on; let us play something," challenged the sprightly Kitty, who, in her short skirted white linen dress

and with her delicate features, much like those of her sister Rose, appeared more like a Christmas doll than a future inheritor of a fortune and of an imposing, dictatorial social position.

At Bobby's suggestion the children decided to play at "being a banker," and after a lengthy, spirited dispute Bobby impersonated the role of Mr. Randall, while Kitty was forced to be content with the character of a "lady borrower."

Bobby perched himself on the assistant cashier's chair and assumed as stern an expression as his childish features and mischievous roving eyes would permit.

"Now, I understand you wish a loan," began Bobby.

"I don't, either," retorted Kitty, sitting herself on a chair in front of the desk.

"Oh, come on and play. When I say 'I understand you wish a loan,' you say 'Yes.'"

"But you won't give me any money."

"If your security is good enough I will. Now," imperiously, "I understand you wish a loan."

"How much can I get?"

"No, no! You say a lot at first; that's business. Now, how much?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"That's fine." He paused judiciously, puckering his brows. "That's considerable money."

"That's the most I could think of," decisively.

"Don't talk that way," instructed Bobby. "You would be put out for making breaks like that. Just don't say anything when they find fault. Now, that's considerable money, but of course you have security?" He paused. "Well, say 'Yes.'"

"Yes."

"Well, I thought so—what?"

"What?"

"What have you got in the way of security?" he asked.

"A farm."

"How large a farm?"

"Ten million acres."

"Well, that's good. Now, what grows on this farm?"

She hesitated, then said: "Fruit-peaches and apples."

"That's good. What else?" he pronounced.

"Pears."

"Any bananas?" Kitty shook her head. "Very sorry," the lad went on, "but we have all the fruit you have in our own back yard. The only fruit farm I could loan money on would be a banana farm. No. No bananas, no loan. Good day."

"But you didn't tell me to say bananas," insisted the girl.

"Tell you! A banker don't tell you anything you ought to know."

After delivering himself of this piece of financial wisdom Bobby endeavored to continue, but Kitty insisted on being the man for awhile. While the argument was in progress the door leading from the vault inclosure opened and in came no less an individual than Jimmy Valentine. He had come from inspecting the new vault, now practically completed, and which he had pronounced as fine a piece of burglar-proof construction as he had ever seen—and Jimmy Valentine in his day, as some of us know, had rightly been considered a connoisseur in this particular connection. To settle the dispute the assistant cashier took Kitty out with him to show her the vault, in the building of which she had shown a childlike interest.

No sooner had the door closed behind them when through the hall entrance came Rose Lane, who, gowned in the height of Paris fashion and of more mature development, presented even a more alluring picture of feminine loveliness than she had at the time three years before when, just out of Vassar, she had rescued Jimmy Valentine from the horrors of Sing Sing prison.

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"Where is Mr. Randall?" she continued.

Bobby grinned knowingly.

"You're always asking for Mr. Randall, aren't you?" he asked saucily.

Into Rose Lane's face came suddenly a flare of anger at the lad, but in a moment it was gone. A smile, tender, hopeful and true, supplanted it.

And Bobby, with all the accrued wisdom of eleven years, saw the smile and smiled in return, for he was old enough to understand.

CHAPTER XI.

JIMMY VALENTINE entered his private office from the room where the new vault had been erected. He saw Rose Lane standing close to his desk, where Bobby was presiding with all the dignity that went with his age. The girl's eyes met his, but only for an instant. Valentine lowered his gaze to the floor, his thoughts whirling rapidly through his brain.

True, at one time he had had serious thought concerning the beautiful young woman who had saved him from Sing Sing, from Warden Handler and the warden's favorite pastime of "solitaire."

But of late he had come to realize that he would be doing her a lasting wrong, a vital injustice, to permit himself to make any serious advances toward her. She had been attracted by him. She was now even more interested in him. He was observing enough to learn this. As for his own emotions toward her? He loved her. That no one would deny who saw him in her company. He could not conceal it. Even the infantile Bobby had guessed what he had endeavored to make his secret. Yet he had realized plainly the uncertainty of his position. At any moment the unexpected might

happen, or, rather, the expected might happen, and some one would possibly uncover and reveal phases of his past that he would be unable to explain. Such had been the guiding thought of Jimmy Valentine in his social intercourse with the banker's daughter during his tenure as assistant cashier in the bank in Springfield, and now he

saw more clearly than ever the wisdom of his course. Doyle-Doyle, the relentless tracker of men—had threatened to "get" him, and Doyle was always an element to be reckoned with.

Although Doyle's threat had been made years before, Valentine had never underestimated the detective's ability nor his tenacity of purpose. While he, Valentine, had taken precautions which he firmly considered would prevent Doyle from getting a hold on him again, yet, after all, it was by no means definitely assured that he would not defeat the ex-convict in his ambition to live "on the square," therefore Valentine must under no circumstances make any serious advances to

ward Rose Lane. The burden of misery that might descend upon him would only be given greater weight.

Valentine desired to talk alone with Rose Lane, and after a lengthy conversation, punctuated by lavish promises of hunting trips, sent the lad away to play with Kitty in the new vault, which for their purpose became a smuggler's cave.

The assistant cashier stepped forward toward Rose, who stood close to his desk, resting her sable muff on its polished top.

"To what am I indebted for this pleasure?" he asked of her.

"Yourself," she smiled graciously on him as she spoke.

Valentine drew near to her.

"How?"

"Don't you suppose I like you as well as do the children?" she answered gayly.

"Do you?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, but why is it that you never do call on me any more?" she questioned reproachfully.

"Well—because"—he became very uncomfortable. She must never know the true reason for his avoidance of her.

"Do you think it's fair to use a woman's weapon against her? You know it's a woman's birthright to say 'because' when she?"

"I meant"—

"What?"

"Oh—ah—what were we talking about?"

"As to why you don't call on me any more."

Valentine struggled to think of a successful mode of escape from answering the question.

"Well, now—don't you see," he stammered. "Of course you do." He was becoming more involved every moment.

The girl's smile began to fade. Rather grimly she interrupted him.

"No, I don't see at all," was her announcement. She moved away from the desk.

"Well, Miss Lane, I"—

The telephone bell rang at his desk. He bent forward and put the receiver to his ear. As he hung up the receiver a clerk entered.

"Will you have the cash now?" the employee asked.

"In a few minutes."

No sooner had the clerk made his exit when a messenger boy entered, bearing a telegram. Valentine tore it open, apologizing to Rose as he did so. The girl saw that the assistant cashier was very busy. She determined to leave him for the present.

As Valentine dismissed the boy she announced that if the press of business would not continue all day she would return. Valentine assured her that in a half hour he would be at leisure and that he would sacrifice everything else in order to talk to her. She started toward the door, assuring him that she would return. As she opened the door she turned and cast a smile in the direction of the assistant cashier.

To be continued

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