

"Alias Jimmy Valentine"

Novelized by
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From the Great
Play by
PAUL ARMSTRONG

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SYNOPSIS.

Warden Handler of Sing Sing prison and Detective George Doyle endeavor to prevail on Bill Avery, a released prisoner, to search out information against a former "pal," a young convict known as Jimmy Valentine. Avery refuses, and Doyle and Handler threaten to attack him. Valentine had a trick of opening safes solely by the sense of touch.

Avery goes. Lieutenant Governor Fay, his beautiful niece, Rose Lane, and two women workers in a rescue mission visit the prison.

Warden Handler hears Rose Lane tell how she was rescued from a thief on a train, and he is amazed at a coincidence. Convict Jimmy Valentine, No. 122, is brought into the warden's office to open a safe as an object lesson to the visitors, and Rose recognizes him as the man who saved her from the thief Cotton.

Valentine says he can't open the safe, enraging Handler. The lieutenant governor and Rose talk with Valentine. Rose pleads with Fay to aid the young prisoner, who is handsome even in Sing Sing garb.

Fay promises for Rose's sake to ask the governor to pardon Valentine. A stormy interview occurs between Handler and Valentine.

Valentine waits patiently in prison for news. Finally he is pardoned and goes to Albany to thank the governor, Lieutenant Governor Fay and Rose.

Valentine refuses positions offered by the rescue mission workers. To his amazement, he meets Bill Avery and a former coworker, Red Flanagan.

Red and Avery try to dissuade Jimmy from "going square." Detective Doyle appears, and Red and Avery hide. Doyle wants Valentine to tell him where Avery is, for he wants to rearrest him. Valentine refuses.

Doyle departs, threatening to send Valentine back to Sing Sing prison. Avery now tries to kill Valentine.

Valentine finally agrees to "go it crooked" again, but a note from Rose brings him back to his former determination to be honest "in spite of the coppers."

Rose persuades her father to give Valentine a position in his bank in Springfield, Ill. He and Red go to work in the bank.

For several years Valentine works excellently and rises to an assistant cashier. He and Rose love each other, but Valentine knows Doyle is on his track and dares not tell her of his affection for her. A mysterious Mr. Cronin turns out to be old Bill Avery, now reformed and a man of business.

CHAPTER XII.

"GEE" went on Red enthusiastically, not appreciating the reason for Valentine's silence, "gee, but that Kit-ty is a great kid! Ain't it funny how a kid like that will get hold of a tough old tramp like me?"

"Nice child," commented Valentine. He picked up the telegram and handed it to Red.

"Red, read that," he said dully, as though discouraged.

The other read in silence.

"Doyle! Good heaven!" he exclaimed.

"Doyle?" said Valentine. "It took him quite a while to uncover us, didn't it?"

"But he's finally done it—got your name and everything."

"Did you notice it wasn't signed?"

"Yes. Who do you suppose tipped you?"

"Doyle," was Valentine's amazing response.

"Doyle?" cried Red, starting back. The assistant cashier bent toward the watchman.

"Doyle sent that, Red. Don't you see he's not sure of me? But if I ran away from the bank when that telegram came—out of town for the afternoon—he'd know he had me."

"Never thought I'd have ducked," commented Red. "And now he'll turn me up too. I'm going." He fingered his hat nervously.

"You're not. He don't want you, and if you stay where you belong he won't see you."

Red nodded his head decisively.

"I'll stay closer to the bank than an emigrant to his tag. And you, Jimmy?"

Valentine smiled as the other lapsed off in his excitement into using his old name.

"Jimmy?" How natural that sounds, Red! he said reminiscently.

"Excuse me, I meant Mr. Randall," protestingly.

"No; it's all right, only don't by any chance use it before Doyle, because I'm going to alibi Doyle until he'll think he's lost his eyesight."

"Ain't?" repeated Red curiously. "I've heard of that before."

"Alibi, that's it, Red," replied Valentine. And he continued rapidly: "You haven't forgotten the one greatest refuge of the crook, have you—our old friend the alibi? Something which proves you were not where you were when something happened. I was never Jimmy Valentine, Red. I was never in Sing Sing. I've been straight all my life and can prove it. I've been waiting for Mr. Doyle nearly three years, and I've got him beat. I never did that job in Springfield, Massachusetts. I was never there in my life. And if I've got to use the crook's tools to beat it, I'm justified. I'm living straight and I'm going to, and all the gods are with me, Red." He took a scrapbook from a drawer and opened it. "Look at that. For five years you will find clippings of Lee Randall when he lived in St. Paul. That man was my cousin. He went to Alaska and never came back. My

name is also Lee Randall, and I defy Doyle to prove he ever saw me."

Valentine, out of breath owing to the long speech he had delivered at top speed, leaned back and gazed triumphantly at Flanagan. The latter stared amazedly at the assistant cashier, trying to guess as to whether or not he was telling the truth. Well, there was a scrapbook. That would afford ready means of proving Valentine's words. Red picked up the book and swiftly skimmed the pages. His attention was held by one of the clippings. He read aloud:

"St. Paul News, March 12, 1906.—The speaker of the evening was Mr. Lee Randall. His subject was—

"Look at that other one," interrupted Valentine, pointing. "See how they join up with the day I came here. And Avery has sent me something that will make Mr. Doyle's eyes blink like an owl."

Red laughed grimly. The telephone bell rang.

"Avery? Did you say Avery?" asked Red.

"Yes," picking up the receiver. Then to the operator: "Yes, send Mr. Cronin right in. There's a friend of his here who wants to see him." He looked significantly at Red.

Flanagan glanced across the room, then at Valentine. "Say," he began. "I'm the only one here in the room except you, and I don't want to see any 'Mr. Cronin.' Don't know him. Who is he?"

"Mr. Cronin," responded Valentine. "Is the man who is going to save you and me from going back to state prison."

Valentine went on to recount to Red how Bill Avery, after he had said goodby to his "pals" in Albany, had gone to the middle west and eventually married a sedate widow of middle age, whose son was an expert photographer, one who operated a large studio in St. Louis and employed men who specialized in covering important events for the newspapers and magazines.

"Avery?" ejaculated Red. "Avery working—absolutely on the square?"

"Yes, that's the truth, the awful truth," laughed Valentine whimsically.

"But you say Bill—Bill Avery is married?" asked Red, completely overcome at the suggestion.

"Yes, it's all true, and Bill has proved a true friend to me—to us," answered Valentine.

"And he's really happy?" went on Red doubtfully. "Him as always had a stable of fillies spendin' his coin. He's happy with one wife?"

The assistant cashier gave vent to a burst of gaiety at the astonishment of the watchman, who probably would have understood the process of reformation in any one but Bill Avery.

But a few minutes elapsed after Valentine answered the telephone call before the door opened, and in came a man whose iron gray hair curled beneath the rim of his high silk hat. Glaringly bright yellow kid gloves adorned his hands. His frock coat, of the latest make, was a bit worn on the edges, and it was for that reason that the secondhand dealer had made a reduction in price to Mr. Cronin.

The newcomer laid a handsome gold headed Indian bamboo walking stick across a chair, took off his gloves and faced Valentine and Red.

"Mr. Randall?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Cronin."

"Cronin is moved," cried Red, starting forward. "It's Bill Avery. How about you, old pal?"

Avery, pleased at the enthusiastic welcome and at the sight of both of his old friends, shook hands with each. Then he drew back and looked from one to the other. "Think of us

"Oh, don't get blue," encouraged Valentine. "He doesn't want you fellows. It's me that he is after." He examined a large photograph which Avery had sent him. It showed the tables and guests at a large banquet in a luxuriously appointed restaurant.

"Yes, I think this saves me," he remarked. He held it before Red, asking, "What's this?"

"Flashlight of a banquet."

"Who is this on the right of the toastmaster?" pointing at a face in the picture.

"You."

"Pipe the date," went on the assistant cashier. "Feb. 9, 1906. Do you remember where I was on that date?" He gazed curiously at Red. Avery watched the proceeding with rare interest.

The watchman became thoughtful. At last a puzzled wrinkle marked his forehead. "Why—why—you—were—in Sing Sing—prison—on—that—date," he replied confusedly.

Valentine and Avery laughed in their superior knowledge.

"No, no," protested Valentine. "This photograph proves I was at a banquet in St. Paul. I'll beat Doyle and I'll make him like it."

"You can't," was Avery's pessimistic comment.

"You said we couldn't go square, any of us, and we all have," was Valentine's rejoinder. "And if we can beat the thing inside of us that calls we can beat one man that hunts."

A clerk knocked at the door and entered to ascertain if he should now bring in a trayful of cash which Valentine was to count. He was ordered to do so at once, and Avery's face became a study as the young man soon re-entered with a tray on which new banknotes of large denominations were piled among glistening rows of gold coin.

"Great snakes, what a chance!" exclaimed the one time thief, looking from Valentine to the watchman. "This is no place for me. Oh, just for one grab and the quick getaway!" He mopped his wrinkled brow. "I'm sweating like a polar bear on the Fourth of July."

"Haven't got it out of your blood yet, eh?" asked Valentine.

"Not the craving for real money. I learned to let the wheat in the grain elevator alone after a month or two, but coarse money like that—wow!" The old man stared fascinatedly at the untold tray.

"Well, we watched each other for awhile," commented Red, pointing to his chief.

"And ain't neither of you ever snatched even one bundle?" asked Avery incredulously.

"No."

"Well, you better get me out of here. I'm going to have lockjaw in both hands in a minute." He reached for his hat and stick.

"No, you're not," put in Valentine. "Come on, Red," he said, walking to the vault room door. "I'm going to prove to Bill that he's honest. He's going to watch that money till we come back."

Avery cried out in protest, but Red followed his superior, and the time worn thief, who had confessed to his friends the weakness that he well knew yet lurked within him, was left alone in the banking office before a tray containing \$63,000 in cash. Within reach was the door leading into the open hallway through which it was but a few seconds' dash to the busy street, where a man would immediately be lost to view in the passing throng.

"It's a dirty trick," muttered the old man, starting after the others. A shaft of yellow light reflected from one of the golden coins caught his eye, drove into his very brain, into the thin red blood that coursed through his hardened veins. He stopped. He turned full around and slowly, with hands eagerly outstretched, tiptoed back to the table bearing the precious burden. His brows narrowed down over his pale gray eyes, his fingers, long talons in their curved fixedness, began to nervously twitch. Then Avery jerked himself away of a sudden. He straightened himself up and started toward the vault room door to summon Valentine. But even as he did so his glance roved back to the alluring tray. He was drawn to it as the nerveless rabbit that succumbs to the insidious charm of the oscillating head of the hungry python.

He stepped to the tray. He seized two packages of hundred dollar bills, thrust them into his pockets, then clutched two more. The fever had him. His eyes shone with the fire of gone days and gone nights. His poisoned blood sang through his veins. Then he stopped once more. He raised his head.

"And have the coppers after me again," he murmured thoughtfully. He laid down a package. "And 'double cross' a pal that put me straight. Not me, not me!" He replaced the remainder of the money. "And coin that comes crooked never was any good."

Avery stood before the tray of money. Now he looked at the tempting fortune with the sure knowledge that he had conquered—that he had faced his greatest test and had not been found wanting.

The thought of how narrowly he had escaped committing the meanest crime of his career came over him, and he realized that he had been on the verge of plunging himself into the death dealing life from which Valentine had rescued him. Unconquerable rage possessed him at his insane lapse into the self that he had cast from him. He swung his fist at the neatly stacked piles of gold pieces.

"Curse you, curse you!" he cried in frenzy. The tray and its contents crashed to the floor and the money scattered in all directions.

Valentine and Red, hearing the noise, came rushing in from the vault room. They saw the floor littered with banknotes and coins. And crouching forlornly in a chair was the figure of old Bill Avery. His hands were pressed over his eyes, and he sobbed in the agony that gripped the soul which had been restored to him.



"MR. CRONIN" FACED VALENTINE AND RED.

three bills left alone together like this in a real bank," he said significantly, and his two hearers could not restrain laughter at the thought of what the circumstances would have meant to them in days now put behind them.

"Did you get the picture?" asked Avery of Valentine. "You told me to send it, but I wanted to see you. That double negative is a wonder."

Valentine looked understandingly at him. He rose from his chair, picked up the telegram from his desk and extended it to Avery.

"Yes; it's all right," he said. "And it came just in time. Today is the day I'll need it," pointing to the telegram. "Read that!"

Avery read the message. The pallor of unerring fear came upon him. His head drooped forward and he glanced apprehensively about him. His hand trembled as he laid the paper on the desk. He sank hopelessly into a chair. "Doyle," the old man choked—"Doyle! He said he'd alibi me, and now he'll do it—or else he'll make me pay blackmail. You never can tell how much a copper wants for keepin' quiet."

CHAPTER XIII.

"I TOOK—some of—that money," Avery finally managed to say as he saw his two friends before him.

"And you put it back," smiled Valentine. "The minute you touched it you found you couldn't!"

"That's it," put in Avery eagerly as he arose and proceeded to aid Red in restoring the scattered money to its place. "I couldn't take it then. Now I can go out of here and know that I'll never steal again."

"You mustn't go until Doyle comes in, for he might see you on the street," warned Valentine. "When he comes you can go out through the vault room and make your getaway while I stall him here."

In talking with Avery, Jimmy Valentine unconsciously fell into the use of the vernacular of his early education.

With a parting handshake Avery went out into the vault room, where Red was to exhibit to him the big new safe. The assistant cashier, now replaced on the table, picked up the photograph, hung it in the place of another affixed to the wall at the right of his desk and inspected it with pronounced satisfaction.

The hall door opened, and Rose Lane came into the office. The girl was in a peculiar mood that day—there was no denying it. Valentine had always found his benefactor, young though she was, particularly difficult to fathom, and today she was more baffling than ever. She talked at length regarding her plans for the children's Christmas celebration, and, standing before his desk, while he stood behind it, she said: "And I want to know what you want for Christmas."

"Is there anything I could want?" he answered in low tones. "Think of what you and two short years have done for me."

"And there's never anything more you want? Don't you ever dream—dreams of, say, two years more?" She turned her eyes to the floor.

"Oh, yes, to go on as I've been going these last two, since your father gave me a position of trust, and make everything good and pile up the money for you."

She drew away from him.

"Haven't you ever thought there might be something I want more than money?"

Valentine hesitated. His voice became intensely serious.

"I don't let myself think of you only as your employee," he finally answered.

Rose turned sideways to him, so that he could not see her face as she delivered her next question, although she would have given much to have been able to watch the expression of the assistant cashier—her assistant cashier—as she asked it.

"But," she ventured, "you must have thought that I would marry some day."

Silence, with Valentine fumbling in embarrassment a pencil which lay upon his desk.

"Yes—I—" he began, but Rose continued his sentence for him.

"And it hurts you to think of it, doesn't it? Say it."

"Yes."

"Go on."

He could endure the situation no longer. The girl had penetrated his very soul with her questions, had uncovered in Jimmy Valentine the secrets of his new life—the secrets which he had resolved to keep buried forever. But now he must speak. He must tell her the truth about his situation as regarded her—part of the truth, at least.

"And the thought of you brings darkness, desolation," he said, keeping a firm grip on the emotions that threatened to unnerve him. "What is the use? You're all there is to live for—to just see you now and then. You're all there is to life. Men have loved and slaves have loved and animals that have been saved have loved, but never were the three loves fused in one. And you're good, and your life is clean, while mine—but you know all that." He inclined his face from her.

"I have forgotten," she said simply.

"You cannot. And any day the shadow of other days may fall. But I want you to know this and believe it as your God—my love for you is a holy thing, sacred and deathless." Valentine was looking earnestly into her eyes now. His hand was resting on the desk. She seized it in hers and drew him toward her.

"Take me in your arms, Lee," she cried fervently. "I love you. I'll love you till"— Her face was upraised to his as she clung to him. He held her

in his arms and kissed her again and again. "How I have longed for you—years—years"— Her words were smothered by his kisses.

(To be continued.)

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