



English I: Writing: Module 2: Lesson 2: Section 5

Excerpt from O. Henry's "A Retrieved Reformation."

Instructions: Read the following excerpt from O. Henry's short story "A Retrieved Reformation."

(1) A week after the release of Valentine, 9762, there was a neat job of safe-burglary done in Richmond, Indiana, with no clue to the author. (2) A scant eight hundred dollars was all that was secured. (3) Two weeks after that a patented, improved, burglar-proof safe in Logansport was opened like a cheese to the tune of fifteen hundred dollars, currency; securities and silver untouched. (4) That began to interest the rogue-catchers. (5) Then an old-fashioned bank-safe in Jefferson City became active and threw out of its crater an eruption of bank-notes amounting to five thousand dollars. (6) The losses were now high enough to bring the matter up into Ben Price's class of work. (7) By comparing notes, a remarkable similarity in the methods of the burglaries was noticed. (8) Ben Price investigated the scenes of the robberies, and was heard to remark:

(9) "That's Dandy Jim Valentine's autograph. (10) He's resumed business. (11) Look at that combination knob—jerked out as easy as pulling up a radish in wet weather. (12) He's got the only clamps that can do it. (13) And look how clean those tumblers were punched out! (14) Jimmy never has to drill but one hole. (15) Yes, I guess I want Mr. Valentine. (16) He'll do his bit next time without any short-time or clemency foolishness."

(17) Ben Price knew Jimmy's habits. (18) He had learned them while working on the Springfield case. (19) Long jumps, quick get-aways, no confederates, and a taste for good society—these ways had helped Mr. Valentine to become noted as a successful dodger of retribution.

(20) It was given out that Ben Price had taken up the trail of the elusive cracksman, and other people with burglar-proof safes felt more at ease. (21) Jimmy, looking like an athletic young senior just home from college, went down the board side-walk toward the hotel.

(22) A young lady crossed the street, passed him at the corner and entered a door over which was the sign, "The Elmore Bank." Jimmy Valentine looked into her eyes, forgot what he was, and became another man. (23) She lowered her eyes and coloured slightly. (24) Young men of Jimmy's style and looks were scarce in Elmore.

(25) Jimmy collared a boy that was loafing on the steps of the bank as if he were one of the stockholders, and began to ask him questions about the town, feeding him dimes at intervals. (26) By and by the young lady came out, looking royally unconscious of the young man with the suit-case, and went her way.

(27) "Isn't that young lady Polly Simpson?" asked Jimmy, with specious guile.





(28) "Naw," said the boy. (29) "She's Annabel Adams. (30) Her pa owns this bank. (31) Why'd you come to Elmore for? (32) Is that a gold watch-chain? (33) I'm going to get a bulldog. (34) Got any more dimes?"

(35) Jimmy went to the Planters' Hotel, registered as Ralph D. Spencer, and engaged a room. (36) He leaned on the desk and declared his platform to the clerk. (37) He said he had come to Elmore to look for a location to go into business. (38) How was the shoe business, now, in the town? (39) He had thought of the shoe business. (40) Was there an opening?

(41) The clerk was impressed by the clothes and manner of Jimmy. (42) He, himself, was something of a pattern of fashion to the thinly gilded youth of Elmore, but he now perceived his shortcomings. (43) While trying to figure out Jimmy's manner of tying his four-in-hand he cordially gave information.

(44) Yes, there ought to be a good opening in the shoe line. (45) There wasn't an exclusive shoe-store in the place. (46) The dry-goods and general stores handled them. (47) Business in all lines was fairly good. (48) Hoped Mr. Spencer would decide to locate in Elmore. (49) He would find it a pleasant town to live in, and the people very sociable. (50) Mr. Spencer thought he would stop over in the town a few days and look over the situation. (51) No, the clerk needn't call the boy. (52) He would carry up his suit-case, himself; it was rather heavy.

(53) Mr. Ralph Spencer, the phoenix that arose from Jimmy Valentine's ashes—ashes left by the flame of a sudden and alterative attack of love—remained in Elmore, and prospered. (54) He opened a shoe-store and secured a good run of trade.

(55) Socially he was also a success, and made many friends. (56) And he accomplished the wish of his heart. (57) He met Miss Annabel Adams, and became more and more captivated by her charms.

(58) At the end of a year the situation of Mr. Ralph Spencer was this: he had won the respect of the community, his shoe-store was flourishing, and he and Annabel were engaged to be married in two weeks. (59) Mr. Adams, the typical, plodding, country banker, approved of Spencer. (60) Annabel's pride in him almost equalled her affection. (61) He was as much at home in the family of Mr. Adams and that of Annabel's married sister as if he were already a member.



(62) One day Jimmy sat down in his room and wrote this letter, which he mailed to the safe address of one of his old friends in St. Louis:



(63) Dear Old Pal:

(64) I want you to be at Sullivan's place, in Little Rock, next Wednesday night, at nine o'clock. (65) I want you to wind up some little matters for me. (66) And, also, I want to make you a present of my kit of tools. (67) I know you'll be glad to get them—you couldn't duplicate the lot for a thousand dollars. (68) Say, Billy, I've quit the old business—a year ago. (69) I've got a nice store. (70) I'm making an honest living, and I'm going to marry the finest girl on earth two weeks from now. (71) It's the only life, Billy—the straight one. (72) I wouldn't touch a dollar of another man's money now for a million. (73) After I get married I'm going to sell out and go West, where there won't be so much danger of having old scores brought up against me. (74) I tell you, Billy, she's an angel. (75) She believes in me; and I wouldn't do another crooked thing for the whole world. (76) Be sure to be at Sully's, for I must see you. (77) I'll bring along the tools with me.

(78) Your old friend,

(79) Jimmy.