

A Professional Recall

by Rex Stout, 1886-1975

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THEY MET AT QUINBY'S UNEXPECTEDLY, for the first time in three months, and after the handshake proceeded to their old table in the corner.

„Well, how goes it?“ asked Bendy.

„Bendy,“ said Dudd Bronson, ignoring the question, „I am the greatest man in the world. I myself am for ham and cabbage, since it tickles my feelings, but if you want anything from peacocks' hearts to marmalade, it's on me.“

Bendy stared at the roll of bills Dudd brought out of his trousers' pocket. „Dudd,“ he said, his voice trembling, „I respect you. Please put it in your breast pocket so I can see the bulge. What was the occurrence?“

„I hate to tell it,“ declared Dudd. „Bendy, I am a modest man. When you admire me most, remember I said that.

„The pity of it is that there was no one to watch me. I done it in solitude.

„One day, about two weeks ago, I walks into the sanctum of David Jetmore. Jetmore is the best lawyer in Horton, over in Jersey. He’s one of them fat, bulgy men that looks right through you with a circumambious gaze.

„Mr. Jetmore, says I, my name is Abe Delman. I been running a store over in Pauline with my brother Leo. We had a fight over a personal matter which ain’t to the purpose, and when Leo began lookin’ for me in an unpeaceful manner I came away for my health. Now I want to get my half of the store which I am broke till I get it, and you should write to Leo’s lawyer, who is Mr. Devlin of Ironton, about a settlement.

„Have you something for a retainer? asks Jetmore.

„No, says I, I’m livin’ at a hotel.

„I’m a busy man, says Jetmore, and how do I know I’ll get any money?

„Mr. Jetmore, says I, that store’s worth three thousand dollars if it’s worth a cent. And if my half ain’t enough, maybe you can get Leo to give you some of his.

„Finally, after I explained promiscuously why I had to keep at an unsafe distance from brother Leo, and other delicate points, Jetmore says he’ll take the job. When he says Devlin, Leo’s lawyer in Ironton, is a personal friend of his, I told him that made it all the better, but I had a mental reserve about the espree dee corpse.

„That same afternoon about four hours later I walks into Devlin’s office in Ironton.

„Mr. Devlin, says I, my name is Leo Delman. I been running it a store over in Pauline with my brother Abe. We had a fight over a personal matter which ain’t to the purpose, and Abe left for parts unknown without my blessing. Two days ago comes a letter from Abe’s lawyer, Mr. Jetmore of Horton, about Abe’s share in the store, which he didn’t wait to take with him, and I told him to write to you, because you should make it a settlement for me.

„Bendy, these lawyers is all the same. All they think about is what’s in it for them. They’re parasites, Bendy. They’re a menace to society.

„Have you something for a retainer? asks Devlin.

„Mr. Devlin, says I, I have not.

„Then, says he, how do you expect to settle with brother Abe?

„Bendy, I know you won’t repeat this to any of our friends, or I wouldn’t tell it. It fills me with shame, Bendy, when I remember that fifty I handed to Devlin. These lawyers is the worst kind of grafters.

„I told Devlin I didn’t want any Pauline natives to know about mine and Abe’s intimate pertinacities, and I waits in Ironton for a settlement. As soon as he got my fifty he wrote off a long letter to Jetmore which he let me read to correct the sentiments.

„It would a’ been cheaper for me to buy that railroad between Ironton and Horton. For eleven days I kept up a to and fro movement worse than a Mount Vernon commuter. It got so the trains wouldn’t start till they saw me comin’. In one day I was Abe three times and Leo twice.

„Jetmore and Devlin kept burnin’ up the mails with lies and criminalities, me a readin’ everything so as to preserve my interests. I was yellin’ for more on one end and less on the other till the fruit got all ripe and just ready for pickin’. Bendy, it was shameful easy, I used to fall asleep in Devlin’s office from sheer angwee.

„It was last Thursday when I got to Devlin’s sanctum, just in time to see him puttin’ on his coat to go to lunch with the stenographer.

„Hello, Delman,‘ says he, ‘I’ll see you in about half an hour. Here’s a letter from Jetmore. Make yourself at home till I get back.’

„When he’d gone I read the letter over just to make sure there wasn’t no changes since I saw it the night before in Jetmore’s office. It said that Abe had decided to accept Leo’s offer of twelve hundred dollars cash, provided it was paid within three days.

„I goes to the stenographer’s desk, picks out a nice printed letterhead, and writes on it as follows:

March 21, 1912

Mr. David Jetmore,
Horton, N. J.

Dear Sir,

As per advice contained in your favor of the 20th inst., I am enclosing herewith check for twelve hundred dollars in full payment of the claim of Abe Delman against Leo Delman.

I shall be pleased to have you acknowledge receipt of same.

Yours very truly,

„I had already practiced Devlin’s hand till I was sick of it, and I signed that letter so that Devlin himself couldn’t a’ told the difference. Then I pulls out a blank check, makes it to the order of Devlin for twelve hundred dollars and signs it *Leo Delman* and endorses Devlin’s name on the back.

„Of course, I could have done some of this work in my own boodwar, but I wanted to use Devlin’s typewriter, and besides, I had a feeling it would be more gentlemanlike to do everything right there in the office. It somehow seemed natural and right to sign a man’s name on his own desk with his own pen and ink.

„When Devlin come back I had the letter all ready to mail stowed away in my pocket.

„Have you got that twelve hundred?’ says he.

„No,’ says I, ‘but I’ll get it in three days or bust.’

„You’d better,’ says he, ‘for when Jetmore says three days he don’t mean four.’

„I mailed the letter and check in Ironton that afternoon, and next day—that was Friday—I goes over to Horton on the very first train, and pedestrinates into Jetmore’s office on the stroke of ten.

„Jetmore met me cordial like a mule that’s just found something to kick. He’d smelled my money.

„Did you get it?’ says I.

„He pulled out the check I’d mailed in Ironton the day before. I looked at it over his shoulder, him holdin’ on with both hands.

„I guess about fifty of that belongs to you,’ says I.

„Fifty!’ says he. ‘Fifty!’

„No,’ says I, ‘I only said it once.’

„That’s what comes of gettin’ into the clutches of one of them grafters, Bendy. They’ll do you every time. But I let it go at a hundred to preserve my own interests. I couldn’t afford no argument.

„Well, says I, give me the check.)

„Give me my hundred, says he.

„I ain’t got it, says I.

„Then we’ll cash the check, says he, and puts on his coat and hat.

„Bendy, ain’t that pitiful? Ain’t it pitiful? It was comin’ so easy I yawned right in his face. Says he, then we’ll cash the check.) Oh, the big fat boob!

„We goes down to the bank, and Jetmore steps up to the window.

„Good morning, Mr. Jetmore, says the teller, obsequies-like.

„Jetmore takes a pen, endorses the check, and passes it through the window.

„Give it to us in hundreds, says he.

„Not for me, says I, steppin’ up. Make it twenties.) You know, Bendy, centuries is all right, but they ain’t enough of ‘em. They’re too scarce to be safe.

„The teller counts out ten twenties, slaps ‘em on top of a pile with a bandage on ‘em, and shoves ‘em through the window to Jetmore. He counts off five and I sticks the rest in my pocket.

„Better count ‘em, says Jetmore.

„I’ll take a chance, says I. The young man looks honest.) The truth is, I was beginning to get the shivers. They always come on me when I feel the stuff.

„Me and Jetmore turned to go. Just as we reached the door I felt that pile of twenties jump right out of my pocket and slap me in the face. Standin’ there lookin’ at us was Devlin.

„Hello, Jetmore, says he. Good morning, Mr. Delman.)

„Bendy, stand up. No man can sit unrespectful while I relate the sequence. It fills my eyes with tears to think of it. I’ve been a modest man, but this is too much for me. I must tell the truth.

„I was in a hole, all right, but I still had hold of the rope. I knew that Devlin thinks I’m Leo and Jetmore thinks I’m Abe, and as long as they didn’t get a chance to chin on it I was safe.

„Mr. Devlin, says I, I’m glad to see you. There’s a little matter I want to ask you about.)

„Jetmore started to spout before Devlin could answer and I interspersed.

„It’s an important matter, says I, and I won’t keep you long.)

„Devlin stood lookin’ at us like he didn’t understand. Of course, Jetmore knew I knew Devlin, because I’d told him he was mine and Leo’s lawyer before the fight.

„Jetmore pulls out his watch and starts to go.

„I’ve got an appointment, says he. I’ll see you later. Drop around to the office about one.) Then he turns to me. Come in and say good-by, says he, and off he goes.

„It took me about two minutes to explain to Devlin that I’d come up to Horton to try to get Jetmore to chop off a hundred on the settlement. Devlin laughed.

„Jetmore don’t do no choppin’, says he.

„Right you are, says I. He won’t even give me no extra time.)

„What was it you wanted to ask me? says he.

„Mr. Devlin,“ says I, „I’m a poor man. Whether I get that twelve hundred I don’t know. But I got some friends in Pittsburgh what’s got it, and if you’ll let me have that fifty back for railroad fare I’ll make it a hundred when I settle up.“

„Devlin blinked hard, and I thought he’d jumped it. But bein’ a grafter, that hundred looked too good to lose. He pulls out a big black wallet, counts out five tens, and hands ‘em to me careful-like.“

„Delman,“ says he, „I know you’re an honest man. I can tell it by your eyes. I feel sure you’ll get the money.“

„Mr. Devlin,“ says I, holdin’ his hand in one hand and the fifty in the other, „I will get the money.“ And I leaves him standin’ there in the bank, watchin’ me through the window.“

„Did you go to Pittsburgh?“ asked Bendy.

„Bendy,“ said Dudd, „don’t be factious in the presence of genius. You offend me.“

„Forgive me,“ said Bendy, humbly. „Let me see the fifty, Dudd. I just want to touch it.“
