

"Ready to tear stuff," facetiously suggested Tod Blount. The third member of the party was John Milton—a veteran of the road, and senior partner of the firm he represented.

The younger men were in high feather as the result of a successful trip and the pride of achievement getting the better of their will to entertain him they poured comparative figures and percentages of increase into Peter's sympathetic ears. John Milton, hero of many such campaigns, eyed his juniors coldly, impatient with their chatter.

During the conversation Peter happened to look about him and caught his unfriendly train acquaintance standing not far away, looking very interestedly in his direction. Peter began to wonder why this man was paying him so much attention. Why should he follow him about and watch him like this? It was getting to be a regular nuisance! His look of annoyance simply evoked a sardonic smile from the intruder as he walked away.

The incident had not gone unnoticed for John Milton, observing Peter's quick frown, turned to seek its cause and forthwith discovered an antidote for boredom since he became instantly alert and attentive. With a smile, which had a suggestion of pity in it, he left his companions still recounting their business triumphs while he went out to add another page to his own successful commercial history.

He found the man for whom he was looking in the Pullman and soon they were deep in conversation. The stranger, heavy browed and rather saturnine in appearance, was by no means as formidable as he looked. The twinkle was never very far from his eye and a winning smile often swept the cloud from his brow. During the conversation he asked a few questions about Peter Freeman and in turn imparted information which afforded both of them a good deal of amusement.

"Gosh—that's funny, Darcy!" said John Milton, chuckling. "But how did it start? What's he got against you?"

"Search me!" was the laconic reply. "Took a sudden dislike to me, maybe—"

"It's going to make it awkward for him when he finds out who you are."

"Oh, well, that's a bridge he won't cross until he comes to it," was the good-natured answer.

During a short stop at a wayside station Tod Blount and Stephen Paterson came hurrying up to John Milton and his new found acquaintance. It was evident that in their opinion the latter was a person of some importance, for the warmth of their greeting was nicely spiced with deference.

"A friend of mine who is on the train with us will be glad to meet you I think, Mr. Darcy," said Blount, looking around for Peter, who to the speaker's dismay passed by at that moment with a hostile eye on Mr. Darcy. John Milton intercepted Tod's attempt to recall his friend.

"Oh that can wait, Blount," he said calmly. "And anyhow your friend doesn't seem very anxious to meet Mr. Darcy." He winked ponderously at Mr. Darcy who smiling a little grimly said:

"Just as I told you, John, that fellow never did like me."

"But, Mr. Darcy, he doesn't know you," protested Blount. "I'm sure he doesn't know who you are."

"And doesn't it look as if he would rather not know me. Now doesn't it?" he added with smiling persistence.

When Blount was enlightened regarding the trivial ground for Peter's hostility he could not enjoy the humor of the situation as did the others.

"Freeman's an old friend of mine, Mr. Darcy," he said earnestly. "I don't like the idea of him getting in wrong with you."

"Oh, that's all right, Blount. That's all right! You needn't worry about it. That's nothing against him."

"Why no, of course not," declared John Milton. "And look you here, Tod, don't you put him wise and make him and all the rest of us miserable for the rest of the trip. He'll find out soon enough."

When the journey was resumed the party split up again and now it was Peter who held forth to Blount and Paterson confidently reciting the business wonders which he expected might be wrought by a man with Eastern experience and enterprise.

"Now don't you run away with the wrong idea, Pete," warned Blount. "The people out here are not so far behind. In fact I think you'll find Benton's some distance ahead of the old store—up-to-date and all as you think it is."

"That's so," said Peter casually, implying doubt. Then more positively, "I hope they will give me a free hand. If they do I'll deliver the goods: but of course that is up to the L. and C. Benton Company."

Peter spoke very emphatically and Blount looked uneasily in the direction of Mr. Darcy, who sat well within earshot.

"Gosh, Pete! I believe he's heard every word you've been saying," he declared in an anxious whisper.

"And suppose he has," was the sharp reply. "It's none of his business, is it?"

Blount's embarrassment was not relieved by his friend Paterson's open appreciation of the situation. He made a quick attempt to turn the conversation.

"Were you living on the East side before you left, Pete?" asked Blount.

"Yes—same house! Same street!"

"And I suppose the same church at which to work your head off?"

"And the same church," said Peter. "Look at this, Tod." He drew his watch from his pocket and passed it over for inspection.

"That's no Friday Bargain timepiece, Pete," said Blount.

"No, sir!" declared Peter, proudly displaying the inscription it bore. "It was given to me by the folks at the People's Church. A lot of nickels and dimes paid for it. That's why I'm so proud of it. People who couldn't afford very much wanted to give their little share. I prize it most highly on that account."

Then as if a little ashamed of his outburst of feeling he added: "The boys at the store gave me a silver-mounted umbrella. Useful sort of present—eh?"

"One of the necessities of life at the Coast," said Paterson, gravely.

Peter smiled.

"Yes, I'm told there's a lot of rain out there, but I suppose the people get used to it. Just a fine drizzle most of the time they say."

"Fine drizzle, eh! Well you enquired at the wrong Information Bureau that time," scoffed Blount. "Huh—fine drizzle! Last spring I got a perfectly good drenching after walking just three blocks in your Pacific Coast drizzle."

John Milton was with them now.

"For more than twenty years I've made this trip," he began in his deliberate manner, "And never yet—"

"Yes, for more than twenty years you've been coming out here," mocked the irreverent Paterson, "and the moss on the roofs grows thicker all the time. Freeman—you are going to a place where moss and rust doth corrupt."

"What a glorious day we've had," said Peter, by way of diversion. "When I left Toronto last Monday it was raining and the wind was cold and raw."

"That's right—start right in knocking the old home town," said Blount. "I'll tell you, though, it won't be long before you will appreciate Toronto more than when you lived there. Rain—raw wind—huh! From now on you'll get all you want of that sort of thing and then some."

"Yes, you take a good look at Old Sol, Mr. Freeman,"