

# A LITTLE FLYER IN BOXES

(Continued from Page 7)



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the coast, he dared not run the risk of a shipwreck in a sudden fog, so he insured his shipment for its full value.

His next move was to make a cursory investigation of the market conditions. His discoveries overwhelmed him with delight, for the factories which had taken orders for additional cannery stock were far behind on their deliveries, the canners were squirming under the enforced wait, and there was absolutely no doubt in Pitcher's mind that his little flyer in boxes was going to net him not less than five thousand dollars net, at the very least. He had a shrewd notion where he could place ten thousand boxes, so he telegraphed an offer at a price slightly higher than the market and proffering delivery immediately. The offer was promptly accepted by wire; whereupon he took down his telephone and called up Billy Allen. When Allen came to his office he handed him the telegram.

"I hate like sixty to do this, Mr. Allen," he said, and grinned wickedly, "but since I've just sold ten thousand at that price, I guess that's the market. I'll sell you the remainder of one hundred forty thousand boxes at that figure."

"I'll take them, Pitcher. Usual terms of two per cent for cash—in thirty days, or net sixty."

"Oh, I'll do better than that, Mr. Allen. I'll give you four per cent for cash in ten days, or three per cent for cash in thirty days. I cannot afford to wait sixty days for my money. It's a thirty-day sale at the latest, or the boxes go elsewhere."

"Cash in ten days after arrival of cars at destination, you thief," replied Allen, and gave him a written order for the stock.

"You really ought to pay for the cost of branding those ends, Pitcher," he continued. "You've held me up right to the last minute so you could skim the cream off the market, and now we'll have to run those ends through our own branding machine at the packing house. You'll pay for that branding, young man, or you'll never get another order from the Amalgamated Canneries while I'm purchasing agent."

"We'll see about that," Pitcher retorted, as Allen departed in high dudgeon.

### REUBEN K. PITCHER

was much elated. He had delivered his boxes in the very apex of the season and he was now about to reap the profit of his foresight and daring. Until Allen had given him the order he had not realized how heavily this box deal was weighing on his soul. For weeks he had not slept more than four hours nightly, for he had boxes on the brain. He had become nervous and distraught, and loss of appetite had ensued, and now that the strain was over he was aware that he was about all in. He sat at his desk the entire afternoon, a feeling of lassitude heavy on him, and at five o'clock when he closed down his desk, the reaction from the nervous tension of the past month had set in and Reuben K. went home to his boarding house absolutely fagged. He had a violent headache.

That night he was taken with severe chills, alternating with fever, and in the morning he was too ill to go to his office. So he called up his stenographer and informed her that he would not be down that day. From

her he learned that the steam schooner carrying his box shook had just passed in.

"Call up the owners," he instructed the girl, "and tell them to discharge that box shook on the bulkhead between Howard No. 1 and No. 2. I'll be down tomorrow and have the stock drayed to the railroad." Then he crawled back to bed and had another chill.

At luncheon when his landlady came upstairs with some light broth, his condition was so alarming that she insisted upon sending for her family doctor. Pitcher protested that he wasn't ill, but "just a little run down," delivered a scathing diatribe on the medical profession and announced that he would be feeling quite himself again by the following morning. In fact, he said he had to be feeling better by then. Nevertheless, she disregarded his instructions and sent for the doctor, who came, took his temperature, examined his internal economy through a stethoscope and informed him that he had a grand little case of double pneumonia.

"TO THE hospital for you, young man," he said, and stepped out into the hall to telephone for the ambulance. He had scarcely reached it and taken down the receiver, when Pitcher, wrapped in a bathrobe, stood shivering beside him.

"I've just GOT to call up my office and leave some instructions, Doc," he began, but the doctor waited for no more. He sprang at Reuben K., picked him up and carried him back to bed.

"You stay there," he shouted beligerently, "if you want to live. Never mind business. That can wait."

"I think," protested the patient feebly, "that you're a horse doctor.



"You wonderful woman!" shrieked Reuben K. and grasped Queenie around the neck in his excitement

You don't know a sick man when you see him. Listen, you big brute. This is important, and if you don't do what I tell you to do, I'll beat you out of your bill. You call up my office—Main 2341—and tell my stenographer to call up—Hodgdon & McCurry—the draymen, and have them dray that box shook on Howard Street bulkhead to the S. P. railroad—and consign it to—get that, Doc?—to the Amalgamated Canneries, Packing house 43—Mindoro, Cal."

He fell back exhausted, and thereafter, for two days he did not refer to the matter again. The doctor called up Pitcher's office as directed, but the line was busy. Pitcher's

stenographer was taking advantage of his absence to gossip over the line with a girl friend.

Reuben K. had been making a gallant fight of it, with the odds heavily against him, and just before he lapsed into delirium against which he had been fighting for hours, he turned his white face toward the doctor and whispered:

"Doc—d'you—do that—for me?"

"What?"

"You know—telephone—my office—"

The medico started and the guilty look that crossed his face did not escape the dying Mr. Pitcher, who shook his head sadly, as if to say: "If you want a thing well done you must do it yourself."

An hour later the nurse saw him plucking feebly at the coverlet and beckoning her with his sunken eyes. She bent over him.

"Is—is it—raining?" he gasped. The nurse nodded affirmatively.

"He-avy?"

"Very heavy. Don't speak. You'll exhaust yourself."

"Raining long?" he queried mildly.

"Two days and two nights," the nurse answered, wondering if this were not a new form of delirium.

"Thought so," he muttered thickly, "heard—rain—window pane—no use—now—tell Queenie—did my best—no luck."

HE closed his eyes to block the tears of disappointment that would persist in coming through his tightened lids. Poor Reuben K.! In that moment, as he hung gasping on the brink of the Great Not Yet, he had just reason enough left to know that he was a ruined man. He had played the big game and lost! He would have to sell the pitiable lot for what he could get; his profit was gone; he would be unable to sell the whole cargo for sufficient to pay the water freight! He had entered the big race for commercial supremacy as a scratch man, and died midway of the course, leaving ruin and debts behind him, and the thought was more than he could bear.

"Oh, Queenie, Queenie," he sobbed, "I wanted it—all—for you—sweet-heart—didn't—want money—myself—just—wanted fight—and win—and—I'm—dying, Queenie and I—never—even kissed—you—"

An hour later the house physician came in and examined first Reuben K. Pitcher, and then the clinical chart tacked at the head of his bed. He looked wise and stroked his beard, after the manner of young doctors, and opined that the crisis had been passed.

"He's been raving since eleven o'clock," the nurse informed him. "He says it's raining on his boxes and he's wiped out and deserves to die. And he's calling me Queenie and cries if I let go his hand—and I'm not a hand-holding nurse."

So the doctor gave Mr. Pitcher a shot of morphine to quiet him and more strychnine to chirk up his jaded heart and left him to fight it out. How well he fought it out may be inferred when the statement is made that a week later Queenie called at the hospital and was admitted to see him—when he kissed her for the first time.

"But you don't seem a bit glad to see me, Reuben," she complained. "Tell me what's the matter, dear."

"Queenie," he began huskily, "I—I want you to be easy on me. If I've aroused false hopes—I—that is, I wanted so to marry you and make you the happiest—in the world, and now I—I can't make good. I'm broke—ruined, Queenie. Cleaned for my last cent, and forty thousand dollars in debt, if I'm a cent. It's awful. I wanted to die and forget it, but I couldn't; and now I've got to live and pay back every cent, if it takes me—"