

A LITTLE ELYER IN BOXES

Mr. Pitcher and Mr. Peets Rub Elbows

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MR. REUBEN K. PITCHER, latest neophyte in the ranks of free lance lumber salesman; who had started on courage and conscious power, and was now, at the end of his first sixty days in business, the proud possessor of a bank account of nearly seven thousand dollars, hurried down California Street until he reached Market Street, where he leaned negligently against a convenient lamp post and fixed an anxious glance upon the portals of the Lumberman's Building just across the street. And lest the reader may jump to the conclusion that Mr. Pitcher was scouting for an order at this hour of the afternoon (it was just five-twelve when he arrived at California and Market Streets), be it known that business, in its vulgar sense, had ended for Rube Pitcher at five o'clock. He would seek no more orders today. On the contrary, he hoped within the next ten minutes to receive permission to place one, although not for the commodities advertised on his pale blue engraved letterhead. Far from it. Mr. Pitcher hoped, with all the warmth of a hopeful nature, to place an order for a complete suit of double harness, and, as a preliminary evidence of good faith, to seal the compact with a blue-white diamond of weight not less than two carats.

FOR the first time since embarking upon the uncertain seas of commercial chance, Mr. Pitcher was undeniably nervous. He stood first on one leg and then on the other; his collar tickled his neck, goose-flesh burst out on the backs of his sturdy legs, and, although the temperature stood not a fraction over sixty-eight, globules of perspiration embossed his classic brow. After enduring this misery for a period that seemed to him to represent the lapse of centuries, he glanced at his dollar watch and discovered that he had been in purgatory less than eight minutes.

"This confounded little engine has busted a valve," he complained; "beside which, it's too cheap for a captain of industry like me to be wearing." He removed it from his near-gold chain and handed it to a newsboy, who received it greedily and fled with shrieks of joy, just as a familiar figure emerged from the Lumberman's Building and started for the California street car. It was Miss Natalie McQueen.

Reuben K. crossed the street in three long jumps and touched her lightly on the elbow. The moment for action had arrived and he was no longer nervous now.

"Hello, Queenie," he said, and stood there beaming at her, and showing all his strong white teeth like an affectionate collie dog. She flushed prettily and smiled back at him. Queenie had that fascinating feminine trick of smiling entirely with her eyes.

"Reuben, Reuben, I've been thinking—" she began.

"About what?" he interrupted.

"That I'd be a gray-haired old lady before I met you again. Do you remember the last thing you said to me, Rube?"

"I have n't thought of anything else for sixty days, Queenie. I said I was going into business for myself, and when I had a nice little game worked up, I was coming back to see you, and I swore I would n't see you again until I'd made good. Listen, Queenie!" He drew her gently to the edge of the sidewalk and lowered his voice, that none might hear. "I was just coming back. I have that little business going already; got a bank account and a decent little commercial rating for a piker, so there's

no use waiting any longer. I've been wanting to tell you this for six months—ever since the day you came to work for the Arago people, and now that I have the price, and I see the light shining ahead, I don't feel so guilty in telling you, Queenie, that you're more to me than —"

"Oh, Rube Pitcher! How-do-you-do?"

A shrill feminine voice burst in on Mr. Pitcher's half completed declaration of love. Ten thousand curses leaped to the tip of his tongue and perished there, as he turned to face the devilish marplot who thus announced herself. It was Miss Jemina Gaffney, a bright-eyed little old maid who worked the private exchange in the offices of the Arago Mill & Lumber Company, where Rube Pitcher had once been employed. She had long cherished a secret passion for Mr. Pitcher and had been heartbroken when he left without saying good-bye. Without waiting to see how Mr. Pitcher did, she entered upon a coy and voluble expose of his unfriendly attitude in thus deserting "them." Pitcher forced a wry smile and answered her in monosyllables, praying the while that the aged kill-joy would move on and leave him to the consummation of the most important deal of his career. As the ragtime songsmiths phrase it, however, Miss Gaffney continued "buzzin' around" for five minutes, until Mr. Pitcher, fearful that he might lose his temper and smite her in her tracks, favored Queenie with a pathetic grin, lifted his hat and declared he must be moving along.

"See you again about that little matter, Queenie," he said, and silently his lips framed the word: Tonight. "I'll give you the address now," he continued, and taking out one of his business cards, he hastily scrawled: "I love you." Then he opened her handbag, dropped the card inside, lifted his hat and fled.

FROM all of which it will be seen quite readily that Reuben K. Pitcher was an impulsive young man, and one not given to letting the grass grow under his feet. Practical in all things, he saw no reason why a busy street corner should not serve as the spot for him to declare his love. Some, he was aware, preferred a moonlit lake and a drifting canoe, a bench on the lawn under the old apple tree, with



What you need, Mr. Peets, is a live selling representative in San Francisco.

the night redolent of roses, or a plain old-fashioned horse-hair sofa with the gas-light burning low. Not so Reuben K. Pitcher. This was Thursday evening, and he knew of old that the parlor at Queenie's boarding house on Thursday nights was sacred to a young fellow in the life insurance business and a damsel who painted sweet peas on china tea-cups. True, he might have waited until Friday evening, but Friday is an unlucky day, and it had occurred to Rube Pitcher that he had already waited long enough. He was a business man and Queenie was a business woman. Why, then, beat about the bush? Not a single legitimate reason in the wide wide world for any such tomfoolery.

HE thought, as he strolled down to the ferry to get an outside seat on an uptown car, of the man who carried the message to Garcia, and he wondered what that individual would have done under similar circumstances. He was hoping Miss Jemina Gaffney would lose her job before the month was out, when a firm hand grasped his arm, and a man dropped into step beside him. It was one of his customers, Jim Reed, of the Reed Lumber Company; and Pitcher erased the frown from his features and greeted Reed cordially.

"I was just up at your office looking for you," Reed explained. "I have an uncle who bought himself a couple of townships of timber in Washington a few years ago, and he's just completed a mill on Gray's Harbor. He expects to saw about a hundred thousand a day, and I happen to know he's looking around for a live man to take over his Pacific Coast Selling Agency. I wrote him about you, Rube, and if you think you can represent him on a five per cent commission and guarantee the accounts—"

"Cinoh," gurgled Pitcher. For that moment the