

By Virtue of Flitters

A Story with Pathos, Humour and Adventure Skilfully Commingled

By NORAH ALTHA FLINT

FOSTER lifted his haggard face and stared at Evan Chetwood, astonishment wiping out the dull misery in his red-rimmed eyes.

"Do I understand you to say, Mr. Chetwood, that you will not prosecute, not denounce me?" he stammered. "If so, I can't have expressed myself clearly, and you fail to realize your position." His trembling fingers rustled among the loose papers on the desk.

"Ten thousand dollars Illinois Central Gold Bonds, \$10,000 Norfolk and Western Generals, \$5,000 Atchison Adjustment Bonds, \$20,000 Union Pacific First Mortgage—it's all gone. Mr. Chetwood, you are a ruined man, and I—good God, what am I?"

Chetwood fidgeted uneasily in his chair, then got up and laid a hand on the other's heaving shoulders.

"I understand right enough, Foster," he said, quietly. "I can't pretend I'm not pretty hard hit, but who am I that I should judge you hardly? How do I know that under similar circumstances, and given the same opportunities, I shouldn't have—have done the same? The conditions of the market were abnormal, the temptation, with the money you had access to, enormous. You've been in Hades ever since the crash and I'm not the man to keep you there."

"Then there's Mrs. Foster to consider, and pretty little Dollie—" The banker groaned and covered his face with his hands, and Chetwood went on, quickly, "And I've been thinking that this may prove to be the best thing that ever happened to me. Oh, you needn't look scandalized. Salvation has been worked out with a pick and shovel before now."

Anyway, Foster, I'm tired of patent leather boots and pink ice-cream, and I'm going West. You remember Bob Ferguson—man who discovered silver in Cobalt?"

Foster nodded, he was past speech just then.

"Well, he's manager of the Big Four Mine now, and I wired him yesterday after you—after I—well anyway, here's his reply offering me a job as book-keeper."

"Book-keeper?" Foster echoed, dubiously. "But—"

"Exactly; I know I don't, not as much as your office boy. But two hours later comes another wire from the dear old chap, 'If you can't book-keep it don't signify, vacancy for cheerful companion for eccentric gentleman.'"

"Cheerful companion!" Chetwood's big laugh held no bitterness and rang as true as if his fortune was still snugly invested in gilt-edged securities. "That's more in my line, eh, Foster? D'ye think Bob'll expect me to do needlework and play draughts?"

THE banker tried to smile, but something clicked in his throat. Five minutes later Chetwood found himself out in the sunlit street. He had an embarrassed recollection of a fat little man with grey face and twitching lips who had tried, in voiceless gratitude, to kiss his hand.

Evan was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. In something less than twelve hours after his interview with Foster, he was

standing in the vestibule of the west-bound train, a little conscious-stricken that he could so lightly wave good-bye to a group of life-long friends.

His Pullman car chair was next to a fat old lady. Opposite him sat such a very pretty girl that he began to consider the best method of getting into conversation with her, when the girl herself unconsciously settled the matter by suddenly getting up and trying to open the window.

Evan was beside her in a moment. "Allow me. Will you have it right up?"

"Thank you," she answered, gravely. "Yes, on the whole I prefer pneumonia to suffocation."

ing vigour every moment, smote him with such force that he resolved to make a dash for the smoking-room. A little choking cough made him pause, and the pretty girl's bright eyes met his with a look of comical dismay.

"It's getting worse," she murmured, burying her nose in a lace-trimmed scrap, "and it only seems to be at this end of the car! What can it be?"

"Whatever it is," Evan returned, "it's strong enough to lean against. I'll call the porter." But when that functionary appeared it was the old lady who commandeered him.

"Porter," she began, nervously, with such manifest agitation that Evan and the girl stared at her with astonishment; "Porter, have you a refrigerator car on this train? Don't ask me why. Just tell me."

"Ah suttlingly have, ma'am."

THE old lady made a dive at her feet, and from the folds of her voluminous drapery produced a wicker-covered basket. The pretty girl turned pale. A young man with pink eyes and wavy legs, who occupied the next chair, hurriedly left the car.

"Put this basket in it," continued the old lady, "and remember"—she paused impressively, "it can't be kept too cold!"

The porter took the basket, which seemed heavy, and grinned cheerfully.

"Why, suttlingly, ma'am," he said, "if it's fruit—"

"It's not fruit," the old lady said, hurriedly, and Evan thought she blushed.

The darkey sniffed at the basket.

"Fish?" he hazarded, dubiously.

The old lady evinced unaccountable discomposure.

"It's not fish," she said, shortly.

But the porter, who seemed to be of an enquiring

turn of mind, sniffed again, and looked thoughtful. Then he had an inspiration.

"It suttlingly am cheese!" he declared, with a flash of white teeth.

The old lady, with a wild glance from Evan to the girl, rose excitedly, and attempted to regain the basket.

"It's—it's nothing to eat," she stammered. "I've changed my mind and will keep it here."

NOW, whether the porter had his suspicions as to the amazing contents of that innocent-looking basket, and purposely upset it, or whether a lurch of the train really made him tumble, will never be known, but by accident or stratagem it fell with a crash to the floor, and to the accompaniment of shrieks from the old lady, and a terrified, "Foh de Lawd's sake! What am dis!" from the porter, there rolled out on to the velvet pile carpet, a moribund dachshund! It lay there very composedly. Its mild, brown eyes stared at the blue and gold ceiling. Its short little legs stuck straight up in the air like an old-fashioned four-poster. And like a feather bed, the old lady dropped beside it.

"Flopsy mine!" she wailed. "Flopsy, Flopsy mine!"

"Didn't you know it was dead?" asked a smothered voice.

"Of course I did," the old lady sobbed. "She died, my precious dear, on the way up from Halifax. I couldn't wait to have her stuffed in Montreal, and so I thought I'd take her right through to



"When at last they emerged from the creek, Green said . . ."

"Extraordinary, isn't it?" Evan went on, easily, fumbling with the latch which proved provokingly amenable, "that no one has yet invented a successful system of ventilation for Pullman cars? You either roast or freeze."

"I fancy it's rather worse than usual," the girl replied, wrinkling her pretty nose; "don't you notice a peculiar kind of—er—?"

Evan sniffed tentatively. "Well, now you mention it," he observed, wondering if he dare drop into the chair beside her, "I believe I do. I will open another window if the old lady doesn't object."

But the old lady did object—so fiercely that the girl flushed with embarrassment.

"I'm so sorry," she stammered, "only the air seems so used up; don't you think," this was a pretty air of appeal, "that it is rather—er—well, smelly?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the old lady, rudely. "The trouble with the rising generation" (she glared at the two handsome young faces before her) "is that they have too much imagination!"

Evan was about to make an indignant reply, but a pleading look from a pair of sea-blue eyes silenced him, and he resentfully sat down, privately christening the old lady Boadicea.

The faint, nameless odour grew stronger. Out of the corner of his eye he saw two small, grey-gloved hands make an agitated swoop into a dressing-bag. Presently the fragrance of lavender-water reached his nostrils. But the smell, gather-