

Prisoners and Captives

By H. S. MERRIMAN

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

"My Dear Helen—If you want to carry out this theater party come and see me about it. I shall be at home all the morning. Yours very truly,

"AGNES WINTER."

The young sailor read this letter among others at the breakfast table. His father and sister were engaged on their own affairs—Helen with her letters, the admiral among his newspapers. When Grace read the letter twice, and then slipped it into his pocket together with the envelope that had contained it.

Miss Winter's elderly maid servant expected Lieut. Grace, for she opened the door and stood back invitingly. He was ushered up into the second drawing room, and after the door had been closed, stood for a few moments irresolute in the middle of the deep carpet. Presently he began to wander about the room, taking things up and setting them down again. He inhaled the subtle atmosphere of feminine home refinement and looked curiously around him. There were a hundred little personalities, little inconspicuous feminine trifles that are only found where a woman is quite at home. There was a silly little lace handkerchief utterly useless and vain, lying upon a table beside a work basket. He took it up, examined its texture critically, and then instinctively raised it to his face. He threw it down again with a peculiar twisted smile.

"Wonder what scent it is," he muttered. "I have never come across it—anywhere else."

He went toward the mantelpiece upon it were two portraits—old photographs, somewhat faded. One of Helen, the other of himself. He examined his own likeness for some moment.

"Solemn little beggar," he said, for the photograph was of a little square-built middle-aged man with a long, oval face. "Solemn little beggar; wonder what the end will be? Wonder why he is on this mantelpiece? I think that I was rather a fool to come here. Tyars would not like it."

While he was still following out the train of thought suggested by this reflection the door opened and Miss Winter entered. She had evidently just come in, for she was still gloved and furled.

"Ah!" she said, gayly, "you have come. I was afraid that your exacting commander would require your services all the morning."

"My exacting commander," he answered, as he took her gloved hand in his, "has a peculiar way of doing everything himself and leaving his subordinates idle."

She was standing before him, slowly unbuckling her trim little seal skin jacket.

"What," she said, suddenly, "about the expedition?"

He looked back at her over his shoulder, for he had gone toward the window, and there was a sudden gleam of determination in his eyes. It was her influence that had disturbed Tyars' resolution.

"What expedition?" he asked curtly, on his guard.

"This theater expedition," she replied sweetly.

"Oh, well, I suppose it will be carried through. We all want to go. I suppose you are not strongly opposed to it?"

"I?" she laughed lightly; "of course I want to go. You know that I am always ready for amusement, profitless or otherwise—profitless preferred. Why do you look so grave, Helen? Please don't—I hate solemnity. Do you know you have got terribly grave lately? It is—"

"It is what, Agnes?"

He was looking down at her with his keen, close-set eyes, and she met his glance for a moment only.

"Mr. Tyars," she answered, clasping her fingers together and bending them backward as if to restore the circulation after her cold walk.

"There is something," said Grace, after a little pause, during which Miss Winter had continued to rub a remarkably rosy little pair of lips together, "that jars. Tyars annoys you in some way. Why?"

Miss Winter changed color. She looked very girlish with the hot blush fading slowly from her cheeks. She did not, however, make any answer.

"Won't you tell me, Agnes?" he urged; and as he spoke he walked away from her, and stood looking out of the window. They were thus at opposite sides of the room, back to back. She glanced over her shoulder, drew a deep breath, and then spoke with an odd little smile which was almost painful.

"His Arctic expedition," she said, deliberately. "If he is going to spend his life in that sort of thing I would rather not cultivate his friendship."

She leaned forward, warming her hands feverishly, breathing rapidly and unevenly. She felt him approach, for his footsteps were inaudible on the thick carpet, and she only crouched a little lower. At last, after a horrid silence, he spoke, and his voice was deeper and singularly monotonous.

"Why should you not wish to cultivate his friendship under those circumstances?"

"Because," she answered lamely, "I should hate to have a friend of mine—a real friend—running the risk of such a horrible death."

He walked away to the window again and stood there with his hands thrust into his jacket pockets—clucky, contented, taking his punishment without a word.

"That," he said, "is the worst of making friends. One is bound to drift away from them. But still it is foolish to hold aloof on that account."

"Our maritime philosopher," she said, "will now expound a maxim. Expound. Derivation—to pound out."

"Shall I get the tickets?" he asked, in a practical way.

"Please."

"Well, then, I will go off at once and book them."

He shook hands and left her standing in the middle of the room.

"Perhaps," she murmured regretfully, "it was very cruel—or it may be only my own self-conceit. At all events, it was not so cruel as they are to Helen. I do not think that they will both go now."

Securely had the front door closed behind Grace when the bell was rung again.

Miss Winter, standing in the drawing room, heard the tones of a man's voice, and in a few moments the maid knocked and came into the drawing room.

"A gentleman, please, miss; Mr. Easton," she said.

"Mr. Easton," repeated Agnes Winter. For a moment she forgot who this might be. "Show him up at once."

Matthew Mark Easton had evidently devoted some care to the question of dress on this occasion. Some extra care, perhaps, for he was a peculiarly neat man. He always wore a narrow silk tie in the form of a bow of which the ends were allowed to stick straight out sideways over

the waistcoat. His coat was embellished by an orchid.

"I am afraid," he began at once, with perfect equanimity, "that I have made a mistake—a social blunder. I came to inform you that I have secured a box—the stage box—for Wednesday night, at the Epic Theater. It will be doing me a pleasure if you will form one of my party. I do not know exactly how these things are managed in England, but I want Miss Grace and her brother to come as my guests, too. Miss Grace was kind enough to ask me to be one of a theater party, and mentioned the Epic, so I went right away and got a box."

"Helen has just gone to procure seats for the same night," said Miss Winter, quickly.

"No," replied the American, "I stopped him. I met him in the street."

Miss Winter knew that they must have met actually on her doorstep, and she wondered why he should have deliberately made a mistake. She felt indefinitely guilty, as if Helen's visit had been surreptitious. Suddenly she became aware of the quick, flitting glance of her companion's eyes, noting everything—each tiny flicker of the eyelids, each indrawn breath, each slightest movement.

"How am I to do it?" he asked, innocently. "A note to Miss Grace or a verbal invitation to her brother?"

"A note," replied Miss Winter, with a gravity equal to his own. "No, Helen, saying that you have secured the stage box for Wednesday evening, and hope that she and her brother will accept seats in it."

He nodded his head, signifying comprehension, and rose to go.

"That," said Miss Winter, skipping away from the subject under discussion with all the inconsequence of her sex and kind, "reminds me of something I heard said of you the other evening. It was, in fact, said to me."

"Then," replied the American, with cheery gallantry, "I should like to hear it. I admit, but it might have got through with a little good luck. There is nothing so humiliating as an unsuccessful attempt to pervert the truth. Have you not found that, Miss Winter? But of course you would not know. I apologize; I am sorry. Of course you never tell that."

"Oh, yes," said the lady, candidly, "I do."

At this moment the curtain was drawn up, and Miss Winter broke off suddenly in the midst of her confession, turning toward the stage and seating herself comfortably to watch the play. In so doing she unconsciously drew her chair a little further away from Helen, and thus left her and Claud Tyars more distinctly apart.

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Like most persons engaged in statistical tasks, that particular compiler had a strong leaning toward mortality records. Out of all the days of the year 122 are marked by the death of some prominent person. According to the almanac those unfortunates met their doom in almost every way known to the modern health bureau. Aside from those who yielded up the ghost in a natural way, three of them "suicided," four were hanged, two were guillotined, three were "assassinated," one was "murdered," two were shot, doughty old Capt. Kidd was "executed," while one man just passed out of existence by getting "lost."

After the obituary notices births are next in importance, although in the opinion of the almanac man the replenishing of the earth is a trivial matter compared with its depopulation. At any rate, only thirty-nine days are impressed upon the mind as natal anniversaries.

As for marriages, they scarcely count at all. Of all the people who have entered into the state of matrimony since the beginning of the Christian era only three of them made sufficient ado about the matter to get into the almanac. They are Anne Boleyn, Napoleon Bonaparte and Charles Stewart Parnell.

The great battles of the world receive discriminating attention from the almanac historiographer, as do fires, famous speeches, the crowning of sovereign heads and industrial strikes. Remarkable trials also receive flattering notice, the latest judicial drama being the case of Nnn Patterson, who has gone down in almanac history along with the Tichborne trial and the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

In the almanac of 1903, education and religion receive their due, the former in a notice of the publication of Johnson's dictionary, the latter in the revision of the Presbyterian creed. As to the relative value of the stage and the pulpit, the almanac writer evidently has pronounced opinions. In his argument the drama gets the best of it, at the odds of two to one, for he devotes eight pages to theatrical celebrities and only four to pulpit orators.

Lovers of sports will find something to tickle their vanity in the record of the Paris automobile race of 1903, the Corbett-Jeffries prize fight, and the achievements of the Boston baseball team which won the pennant in 1907.

Unfortunately, the almanac scribe is doomed to anonymity, but it is safe to say that he hails from Ohio. At any rate, that is the only State whose admission into the Union is considered worthy of comment.

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A healthy old fellow, who is not a fool, is the happiest creature living—Steele.

CHAPTER XIX.

Had the keen-witted Easton been asked why he felt impelled to disburse ten guineas for the benefit of the lesses of the Epic Theater, he would scarcely have been able to make an immediate reply. In his rapid, airy fashion he had picked up and placed together certain little bits of evidence tending to prove that the young people with whom he found himself over

somehow sudden terms of intimacy were exceedingly interesting.

Matthew Mark Easton was intensely surveying the half-empty house when Miss Winter, Helen Grace and Owen were shown into the box by an official. His quick glance detected a momentary droop of Helen's eyelids. A blundering man would have made some reference to Tyars' lateness of arrival. Easton did no such thing. He proceeded to draw forward chairs for the ladies, and did the honors with a certain calm ease which in no way savored of familiarity.

"I should like," said Miss Winter, untangling the ribbon of a jaunty little opera glass, "the darkest corner."

"Why?" asked Helen, almost sharply. "Because the place is said to be very touching, and I invariably weep."

"Sorry," said Easton; "sorry it cannot be done. But I can lend you a huge pair of opera glasses."

"But," urged Miss Winter, "my tears drop—audibly on the program."

"We want the dark corners for the men—the background," urged the American, holding a chair invitingly. "We love the shadow—eh, Grace?"

"Speak for yourself," said the sailor, bluntly, pulling forward a second chair and seating himself immediately behind Miss Winter.

One great fault in Matthew Mark Easton was soft-heartedness. He was one of those mistaken men who hesitate to punish a dog.

"It appears," continued Easton as Tyars entered the box, "that the piece is touching. We shall require your moral support; that calm exterior of yours will, I surmise, assist us materially to keep a serene countenance turned toward the stage."

"Don't be personal," replied the Englishman. "You may rely upon me at the pathetic parts. It is some years since I wept."

"The last time I did it," said the American, thoughtfully, "was when I got my ears boxed because another fellow broke a window."

Helen and Miss Winter laughed. They all felt that there was a hitch somewhere. They were conversationally lame and halt.

"We both told untruths about it," continued Easton, determined to work this mine to its deepest. "But mine failed, while his succeeded. That was why I wept. I was not an artistic lie, I admit; but it might have got through with a little good luck. There is nothing so humiliating as an unsuccessful attempt to pervert the truth. Have you not found that, Miss Winter? But of course you would not know. I apologize; I am sorry. Of course you never tell that."

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SIGNAL SYSTEMS THAT ENSURE SAFETY

ON AMERICAN RAILROADS

"NERVES" THAT CONTROL DISPATCH OF TRAINS AND CONVEY MESSAGES OF ALL KINDS AND WARNING



The operation of a modern railroad, with its numerous trains running at high speeds, is made possible by the use of what appears to be a very complex series of signals. One glance at the network of tracks at the entrance to a great railroad terminal mazes the uninitiated. Every track is correlated to another, winding and curling now from this side, now to that, like a mass of writhing, glistening serpents. Yet over this apparently heterogeneous collection of railroads are constantly running, seemingly by some occult gift picking out their way and avoiding one another.

The block signal system is a plan devised to prevent two trains going in the same direction from running together. A block consists of a section of track usually about two miles long. When the signal is set against a train, it must not enter the block until the proper signal is given. In this way the exact location of every train is kept at the various offices of the train dispatchers.

The semaphore, which is the usual type of signal used on roads in the East, is a very old design. The first telegraph system was semaphoric, and it has been found to have advantages over most other types, although the disk system is used on some roads, and some western roads are operated on what is known as the staff system, a block system more extensively used in England than in this country. All of these systems have the same underlying idea—that of advancing a train block by block or of being able to halt it before it enters a block already occupied. The difference is to be found in the type of signal and the method of operating it.

About 40,000 miles of railroad in this country are operated by some one of the three systems mentioned. The semaphore type is used generally in the East. In installing this system the posts or arches sustaining the semaphores are placed at each division point or at each block terminal, the distance apart depending on the length of the block. Where traffic is frequent the blocks may be several miles long, but at the entrance to a great train shed, such as Union Station, Boston, where the shortest blocks in the world may be seen, the distance between blocks is only a few hundred feet.

Travelers have noticed that at some points three semaphore arms are set on one post. To the average rider two of these appear to be superfluous. On the contrary, the three arms carry a very legible signal to the engine driver. The top semaphore represents the nearest block; the next the one ahead and the last the block beyond that. "Where the locomotive is running at the rate of fifty miles an hour," says Day Allen Willey, in Cassier's Magazine, in which he thoroughly explains the workings of the "nerves of a railway," "the three signal post is essential to the safety of a short block system, since considerable track room is needed to bring the train to a full stop, especially on a level or down grade."

The block signal may be controlled from a station at the end of each track division. As the train enters the operator by pulling a lever throws his signal to the danger position, the lever being connected with the semaphore by heavy wire passing over pulleys at the curves. It is usual to supplement the manual block system by the use of telegraph or telephone.

Where traffic is heavy the automatic block system has found much favor. It is usual to supplement the manual block system by the use of telegraph or telephone.

It is only within a few years that the three-position signal has found favor. With this arrangement it serves both as home or distant positive signal and also as a distant or cautionary. Placed horizontally, the semaphore indicates stop; when hanging at an angle of 45 degrees from the horizontal it indicates all clear for that section, but means also (the same as a distant signal) "be prepared to stop at next signal."

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