The Mysterious Monogram

An Absorbing New Novel

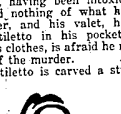
By Howard P. Rockey

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The morning after a dinner given at his club by Lord Harcourt, an English nobleman, to announce his engagement to Miss Grace Marston, one of his guests, Townehende by name, is found dead, evidently stabbed while sitting at a table in one of the card rooms. Later the old door man is found back of the club strangled to death. The only strangers at the dinner were Kandwahr, an Indian prince, and Cornish, an American.

Harcourt, having been intoxicated, remembered nothing of what he did after dinner, and his valet, having found a stiletto in his pocket and blood on his clothes, is afraid he might be guilty of the murder.

On the stiletto is carved a strange



monogram, which Harcourt finds later on a cigarette stub on the table by the dead man and another in the Marston's drawing room and still another in a flowerbox near Miss Marston at the Cornish reception.

Returning home early, Harcourt finds Kandwahr has broken open his vabinet and is taking the stiletto from t. Harcourt realizes it is best not to call the police but later Kandwahr is arrested while attempting to throw the knife into the river.

Harconet nearly distracted with worry over the affair receives a new surprise when he finds a pendent with the mysterious monogram carved in silver which Grace claims is hers. A warrant is issued for Harconet's arrest but his friends cleverly contrive to get him away and aboard Cornish's yacht.

He rebels at being kidnaped but cannot escape. McBee has discovered that Kandwahr was a half-brother of Townsende. Later he finds by the roadside near Southhampton an unmarked suitecase containing a man's evening clothes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CRUISE OF THE MURITA.

Meanwhile the Murita was steaming rapidly out to sea, and immediately upon leaving Harcourt in his cabin, Cornish joined the yacht's captain on the bridge.

"Any signs of pursuit?" Cornish asked.

"None," the captain said. "I've taken a northerly course to keep out of the path of the big liners—just far enough out to avoid being sighted from shore."

Cornish nodded with satisfaction as he regarded the bluff New England captain, a man who knew the Atlantic as well as he did the narrow path leading down from his home on Cape Cod to the village tavern nearby. Capt. Whitford was a man of few words—and of fewer words that were suited to the ears of polite society. He was reputed to have the gift of swearing for a longer period without repetition than could any seaman afloat, and to his crew he was master both heartily loved and cordially feared. Whitford was absolute ruler of his yacht, and if its owner had ordered him to attack a battleship or scuttle a steam yacht he would have done so without question if the thing were possible.

When, two days before, Whitford had received a telegram from Cornish, instructing him to be in readiness to sail at a minute's notice, with fuel and provisions for an extended cruise, he had followed his instructions to the letter. The notice had been brief, but Whitford had overlooked nothing, even to the laying in of a complete wardrobe for the mysterious guest whose measurements the yacht's owner had sent him.

"See here," said Cornish, lighting a cigar and leaning against the bridge rail, "I'm going to tell you a few things. Do you know who this Englishman is?"

"No and I don't care!" snapped Whitford. "He looks like a damned fool and probably is. Whatever else he may be is none of my business."

"You're a man of sense," Cornish congratulated him. "This much, however, I want you to know. There are a great many people in England who do know him, and who are wondering where he is at this minute. I don't intend that they shall find out. While he is on this yacht they are not likely to do so. How long do you think we can cruise without touching port for supplies?"

"Six weeks if necessary—or even longer if we rough it a bit."

"Good! I don't care where you go, but keep out of sight and don't communicate with any ship we pass. There may be a man-o'-war or a cutter or two on the lookout for us, but don't pay any attention to their signals. If anyone shows a disposition to come too near or to talk to us, simply give them the slip. Have you a wireless operator on board?"

"Yes."

"Well see that he doesn't use the apparatus except to listen to other ship's conversations. I don't suppose there would be any trouble even if the crew did know who I have aboard, or why he is wanted ashore, but it's just as well that they don't know anything about it."

"They won't—and if they should find out, I'll answer for them. I'm captain of this ship and my orders are obeyed!" said Whitford flatly. "You tell me what you want, and I'll see that you get it. If that wireless fellow tries to monkey with his keys, I'll throw him overboard!"

"Don't," Cornish advised. "We may need him later on. If we can keep hidden we'd better remain out for a month at least. Then I'll figure out what is best to be done. Eventually, when it is safe to try, I want to make New Orleans and go home from there by rail."

Whitford nodded. "In case we are overhauled?" he asked abruptly.

"In that event keep safely ahead until you can run close enough to shore to enable us to make a quick landing in the launch. Once I get my guest on land turn the yacht about and give our pursuer the longest chase you can."

Making his way down from the bridge, Cornish walked slowly aft to find Harcourt talking quietly with Adele under the deck awning. Adele, in her neat yachting costume, looked the picture of health, and she was laughing at Harcourt when her father joined them.

"Mr. Cavendish is trying to convert me to his cause," she said laughingly.

"Cavendish?" Cornish said. "Oh, so that's the new name you've selected is it? I'll not have you plotting treason, sir!" he added with a grin.

"Isn't he ungallant!" Adele said. "He really prefers the interior of an English prison to sitting here with me. If he was not engaged I should never forgive him!"

Cornish smiled. "Sorry you're so restless," he said to Harcourt. "But I'm afraid you'll have to put up with our society for a little while longer. We won't see land again until some time next month—I hope."

"I cannot make you out, Mr. Cornish," said Harcourt in perplexity. "You have been kindness itself to me since you brought me on board this morning, and under other circumstances I should enjoy the trip immensely, but I simply cannot understand your forced detention of me here. It is an interference with my personal liberty which is absolutely unwarranted, and I assure you that at the first opportunity presenting itself, I shall make good my escape."

"Fire ahead!" Cornish chuckled. "I haven't heard of anyone walking on the sea recently, and that's about the only way you're likely to get back to England for a long time to come. You've a difficult proposition ahead of you, and what is more, I meant exactly what I said when I told you I'd put you in irons if you try any monkey business."

"You don't really?" Harcourt gasped.

"I most certainly do, and don't you forget it," came the prompt response. "Have a cigar?"

Realizing that he could not move Cornish, Harcourt gave up trying, but for the remainder of the day the American's attitude rankled in his breast. Nothing that would add to his comfort was left undone, and both the millionaire and his daughter exerted themselves to the utmost to make the days pass pleasantly for Harcourt. Whenever he brought up the subject of returning to London his suggestion was flatly and unceremoniously vetoed by Cornish.

And as the days passed Harcourt tried to content himself with his situation. But he could not help thinking of his fiancee, and wondering what had happened since his disappearance. The thought that Grace might now be deeply involved in the affair, troubled him. Times without number he told himself that it was absurd to connect her with the murder, yet her wearing of the mysterious and constantly recurring monogram, fed his suspicions until he could not lose them.

What was it she had done that she would not tell him about? What did she know of it all he wondered. And sometimes—still doubtful as to his own part in the crime, he thought he could go mad. Since the first day out he had eagerly watched the horizon for signs of other craft. Whenever Whitford observed a sail or the smoke from a steamer's stack, however, the yacht's course was promptly altered, and soon all of them were left far astern.

For more than a week now there had been nothing on any side but the broad expanse of sea, and the Murita, with all on board, was as completely isolated from the rest of the world as if the yacht had left it. Yet Harcourt was sure that England lay not far away to the east. He realized, too, that he was but seldom left alone, and that during the long daylight hours, either Cornish or his daughter were constantly near him. He was free to do as he liked, but at all times he felt keenly the fact that he was a prisoner.

At night, after the others had retired, he frequently paced the deck alone, smoking and wondering what was being said of him ashore. He wondered, too, how Kandwahr fared, and then he would recall the dagger with its strange marking, until the curious monogram, flashing through his brain, brought back again the horror it had first struck into him. There was a weird sense of terror for him in the thing, and he asked himself a thousand times what the symbol might represent. To him it meant only haunting doubts and strange fears, yet he knew that the character held a meaning that would solve the whole problem if he could only discover it.

Gradually he struck up a friendship with Benson, the second officer, who always stayed nearby when Harcourt walked on the deck at night. He was a young man of good looks and pleasant manners, and he seemed ready enough to talk when Harcourt approached him. Often as the yacht plowed through the swelling seas, the two talked for hours, and frequently Benson told Harcourt of the country that he and Cornish claimed as home.

Sometimes Harcourt wondered how much Benson knew concerning him, but as Cornish had warned him not to reveal his identity, he refrained from questioning the man on the subject. Talking to him seemed to relieve the strain of the long nights when he could not rest alone in his cabin, and gradually, after several extended conversations, Harcourt wondered if he could not make use of Benson.

He considered the idea carefully and at least resolved to try it. If the Murita would put in at any port, Harcourt knew he could reach Scotland Yard by telegraph within a few hours and advise MacBee of the reason for his disappearance as well as his desire to return. So, when they were alone again on the deck the following night, he made his first attempt.

"Benson," he began, as he leaned against the rail, "what would you consider a great deal of money?"

"I—I don't know—why?" said the officer.

"I mean what do you consider your prospects worth—what do you expect to have when you go back home and ask some girl to marry you?"

Benson laughed. "I'm not likely to marry," he said. "There's only one woman I'd care to have, and I'll never win her."

"Perhaps you would—if your career offered greater opportunities," Harcourt suggested.

"I'd need a fortune greater than I'll ever get at sea," Benson told him.

Harcourt stood silently looking out through the darkness at the great black waves rolling as far as the eye could see. "Benson," he said at last, "There is a woman back in England who is wondering where I am—why I do not come back at a time when she needs me. For reasons that I need not explain, Mr. Cornish is determined that I shall not go to her. I am a very rich man—a man of some influence in the kingdom—and if I could do so, I would return to that woman."

He stopped and felt Benson looking at him strangely. "What do you mean, sir?" the man asked.

"I mean that if I could be put ashore anywhere I would willingly pay £50,000 to the man who made that possible."

Benson stared at him in astonishment. "Fifty thousand pounds!" he said.

"Why, sir, that is a quarter of a million dollars!"

"It is," Harcourt said quietly. "And I mean exactly what I say."

Benson laughed. "That's funny," he said. "Are you trying to kid me."

"I don't think I understand?" said Harcourt.

"I mean you're surely not in earnest—you're joking?"

"I was never more serious in my life. If you can win over enough of the crew to secure command of this yacht, and make the nearest port at once, I will pay you £50,000 the day you set me ashore."

"It couldn't be done, sir," Benson said, at first doubting the sanity of the man beside him.

"A great many things can be done with that much money, Benson," Harcourt urged.

"I know it, sir, but what you suggest means mutiny and you could not turn this crew against Captain Whitford even if you promised every man of them a reserved seat in Heaven."

"You might suggest the thing to Captain Whitford himself," Harcourt suggested.

"Bribe Whitford!" Benson threw back his head and laughed heartily. "And be knocked flat for my pains. You don't know what you're saying. If he even knew I had let you talk to me like this, he would have me in the jug!"

"You believe him absolutely loyal to Cornish, then?"

"I am sure of it."

"Mr. Cornish is a very rich man, Benson, but I am richer than he."

"It's no use, sir," Benson explained. "He is a rough man and not a saint by a long shot, but he has the good old New England ideas of right and wrong mighty strongly developed in him, and he wouldn't do a disloyal thing no matter what you offered him."

"Then he will do what I wish," Harcourt said. "That is, his very sense of honor will win him over. A great wrong is being done to me and to persons ashore. A crime has been committed there and—well, I am concerned in it. If I do not return speedily, an innocent person may be made to suffer for my absence."

Benson gave a little exclamation of surprise, and stared sharply at Harcourt. He had been ashore the night before the Murita sailed, and had heard a great deal of comment on the mysterious crime that everyone was interested in. "Why are you?" he demanded suspiciously. "Not——"

"I am the Earl of Harcourt."

"Good Lord!" Benson exclaimed.

"Now you understand my wish to return—as a man of honor, who gave his word not to leave the country. In fact, there may even be a warrant for my arrest."

"What is Mr. Cornish's object in keeping you here against your will?"

"He has reasons of his own, opposed to mine," said Harcourt. "It is my wish to land and give myself up to the police."

"You want to give yourself up!" Benson repeated dubiously. "Say, you are a queer one!"

"My offer still stands," said Harcourt. "Think it over carefully."

Benson stood there silently, looking out over the yacht's side. He was thinking, formulating a plan in his own mind—one that appealed to him strongly. The ship's bell clanged sharply, interrupting his thought, and he turned to Harcourt with a start.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "There's almost no chance, and I'm taking my life in my hands when I do it—but I'll see what can be done."

"You'll have to take your chances while you're on the yacht," Harcourt told him. "But once you are on shore I can guarantee that your work will cause no trouble."

"Remember, I'm not promising anything," said Benson, "but if there is any chance of putting this over I'll let you know. Don't question me. When the time comes—if it does come at all—I will let you know."

"Thanks," said Harcourt. "Good-night."

He threw his cigar into the sea and went to his cabin, leaving Benson alone with his temptation on the deck.

CHAPTER XIV.

MUTINY ON BOARD.

At breakfast the next morning, Harcourt watched Cornish and Adele carefully. It had occurred to him that Benson might repent and report their conversation to his chief, but if the two did know anything of the matter they gave no signs of it. The thought that the success of his plan might implicate Cornish when his action should come to MacBee's attention, also disturbed Harcourt, and angry as he was at being held a prisoner, he appreciated his abductors' motive, and wished no harm to come to them.

When the meal was over he walked on the deck with Adele for more than an hour, trying hard to conceal the impatience he felt. At last, however, she left him, and shortly, to his intense satisfaction, Benson approached and nodded pleasantly. They were standing apart on the after deck, and although striving to convey the impression that their conversation was purely a casual one, Benson signalled to Harcourt that he had something important to say.

One of the seamen passed and Harcourt commented upon the weather, but as soon as he had gone, Benson stepped closer, and pretending to point out something off the port bow, said "I think what you wish may be possible."

Harcourt's pulse leaped. "What have you done?" he asked.

"Found five of the crew who will help us," Benson said in a low tone. "With you and me that is seven. If everything goes well we should be able to overpower the others, even though they are three to our one. They will be surprised and I think it can be done. The five who are with us will be on watch with me at 11 tonight. The others will be asleep below. We will simply fasten down the hatches and handle the yacht ourselves. The captain will be in his cabin, and Pierce, the third officer, on the bridge. Two of us can easily handle them, while you must see that Mr. Cornish does not leave his cabin. Have you arms?"

"No."

"Take this then." Benson slipped a big revolver into his hand and Harcourt slipped it into his pocket quickly. "I hope this won't be necessary," he said.

"So do I," Benson agreed. "But Whitford wouldn't hesitate to shoot and we can't afford to take chances. The moral effect of a gun is good, you know."

"How soon can we land?" Harcourt asked.

"In a few hours we can make the coast of Scotland," Benson replied. "My plan is to run in as close as is necessary for the seven of us to go ashore in the launch, leaving the others on board. I don't want to run the yacht into port under the circumstances, but I figure that in view of the whole situation, Cornish won't dare to make any trouble after we have gone."

"Once on shore the police will be with you, naturally," Harcourt assured him.

"That is what I told the boys," said Benson. "Now, until you hear the signal, don't come near me. Remain in your cabin until 11 o'clock, then go right to Cornish's door and see that he doesn't get on deck. When we have done our part I will come to you."

To Harcourt, hoping earnestly for success, the day seemed endless. He spent the afternoon in his cabin, feigning a headache because he wished to be alone with his thoughts—to plan his course once he was free to return to MacBee.

In the evening, after dinner, he joined Adele on deck and for the first time, she told him of the part she had played in his abduction. Harcourt looked in admiration at the girl by his side, doubting, in spite of her words, that she could have played the role of which she told him.

"You don't know what an actress I am," she said laughing. "I've always wanted to go on the stage, but, of course, dad wouldn't hear of it. Oh, it was glorious, and my only difficulty was not to laugh in the man's face—he was so completely deceived. It was a chance of fortune that he had never seen you."

"But I can't imagine you masquerading as myself!" Harcourt protested.

"Oh, I say, can't you really!" she drawled in perfect imitation of his voice.

He stared at her for a moment, and then he laughed outright.

"Now are you satisfied that I did it?" she demanded.

"You're wonderful!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "Really, Miss Cornish, you and your father have done too much for me I wish I could appreciate it as I should, but I'm afraid I can't."

"You don't imagine we're doing all this for your sake do you?" she retorted.

"Not doing it for my sake?" he asked in a puzzled tone. "Then why on earth are you doing it?"

"For Grace," Adele said simply.

"Lord Harcourt, father and I have become very, very fond of Grace. If anything should happen to you, it kill her. Don't you think you owe it to her if not to yourself, to avoid the danger of this situation if you can?"

Harcourt stood silently, avoiding her searching gaze. He wondered what the girl would say if she knew the grave suspicion in his own mind—if she realized that his greatest desire to return was prompted by the thought that his absence might mean greater danger to the girl for whom the American felt so deeply.

"Miss Cornish," he said, after a moment. "There are several phases of this affair that you do not understand clearly. I cannot discuss them with you any more than I could with Grace."

"What is the trouble between you two?" she asked abruptly. "Oh, I knew there was something the moment I found Grace unconscious by your side the night of our reception."

"Please don't question me," he begged. "I cannot say more now. Some day, perhaps you will understand—although I hope you never will!"

"Poor boy!" Adele said feelingly, "for, do you know, Lord Harcourt, you are just a great overgrown boy. We all admire your courage, your high sense of honor, and your absolute indifference to your own fate—yet we cannot but feel that the strange situation in which you have found yourself has carried away your good judgment. Try to content yourself here. I am sure no innocent person will suffer through the fact that you are safe, and by accepting your present position philosophically, you will surely preserve your own future happiness and that of the woman you love."

She spoke very seriously, and put her small hand upon his arm as she leaned close to him. "Can't you see that we are right?" she urged.

"I wish I could feel that you are," Harcourt replied. "With all my heart I do—but I am afraid I cannot."

He saw the disappointment in her face as she withdrew her touch. "Please try," she begged. "I know that time will straighten out all of this horrible tangle."

And she turned to leave him alone. Harcourt watched her cross the deck and enter her cabin, and with a little sigh began to pace up and down nervously. Perhaps he was making a mistake in trying to outwit these good friends who were determined to save him in spite of himself, and he wondered if he was justified in attempting to carry out the plans for the mutiny. In any event he resolved that no harm must come to Cornish and Adele—that if necessary he would tell MacBee that he had deliberately run away, and lie as to his whereabouts during his absence. A change of heart—repentance at having broken his word—would be sufficient explanation of his return.

So struggling with himself, he passed the remaining hours until nightfall. To avoid all chance of suspicion, he forced himself to dine with his hosts, and was more or less successful in making Adele feel that he had at last become resigned to his enforced presence aboard the yacht.

Slowly the early evening passed. Adele amused herself by playing quietly at the piano in the corner of the salon, while Cornish and Harcourt smoked in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. Now and then Harcourt stole a glance at the great figure of the American and marveled at his great strength. Determination of purpose was plain in every line of his splendid physique, and in the strong lines of his face Harcourt observed a strange mixture of kindness and brutality. Unquestionably Cornish was a man of tremendous force, a man not to be trifled with, and as he watched him, Harcourt knew that unless he succeeded in gaining control of the yacht that night, Cornish would certainly carry out his threat to put him in irons.

(To be Continued.)

Parental Vigilantes

FATHERS and mothers in Kansas City, Mo., have organized a secret society known as the "Parental Surveillance Association of North America," the object of which is to determine the intentions and eligibility of the young men who call on their daughters, future action by the parents to be based on what the association regards as the girl's best interests.

The plan on the surface looks easy and wise. A young man calls on a girl once; no surveillance. He calls the second time. Mother puts on her arctics and furs and braves the frigid temperature of her daughter's displeasure by going into the parlor to take a look at him through glasses which rapidly get frost covered.

Th parental Surveillance Association of North America is notified of the second call; a report on the young man is asked for, and, if he calls a third time, he is handed the following letter:

Dear Sir—We wish to have a word with you in regard to your courtship of Mr. ————'s daughter. Whether or not your intentions toward her are serious, we have been in doubt for some time. You have told her that you love her, but do you mean it? Young man, you have already frequented his home, and monopolized the company of his daughter, sufficiently long to make a declaration of your intentions. If you mean business, say so. If you are not serious, then gaze on some other pasture. His daughter's welfare must be protected.

Yours truly,
PARENTAL SURVEILLANCE ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA.

All of which may seem, in the eyes of the P. S. A. of N. A., an insurmountable ten-barred fence around Daughter, but which, to her, is a fence so low she can clear it while wearing a hobble skirt—if she wants to!

It all depends on the kind of creature inside the fence. The P. S. A. of N. A. takes it for granted that her views are in perfect accord with those of the members above mentioned slice of the alphabet. They expect her to say at breakfast, with the humility and downcast eyes that characterize the kind of a maid they think they have in the enclosure.

"I wish to inform my respected parents that John Doe called on me last evening, to return an umbrella he borrowed two weeks ago. As it was his second call, I ask you to submit his name to the Parental Surveillance Association of North America. I feel highly honored at an opportunity to abide by any decision made by that honorable body."

But the modern daughter, be she from Kansas City or Kalamazoo, is not the kind of a creature the members of this great reform association imagine. If its decision stamps approval on the young man, she will begin to regard him with suspicion, and if it disapproves she will tell it "to go hang."

If the association gives a man the Eligibility medal, he doesn't marry the girl, for how long is the medal good? Will there have to be a monthly auditing of his moral accounts, or will an investigation of his supply of grace be asked only when he looks at a girl?

If he is a widower, will the number of his children serve as a handicap or an asset? How much credence will the association place on the testimony of his first wife's relatives?

Will the fathers and mothers agree on the standard of eligibility? The soup that is seasoned to suit Mother is too flat and insipid for Father. The young man may have a soul that is always on the hill-tops, and every sentiment of his heart be garlanded with posies; and Mother, reflecting the glamour of romance and rose color from Daughter, will approve. But Father will brush all sentiments aside and demand to know the young man's income if he is afraid of work, has he good horse sense, and, above all, does he know how to be good to a woman?

One of the by-laws of the association demands that, when a man tells a girl he loves her, and she answers that she loves him, they must marry. But how many of our fathers and mothers married their first loves?

Have the members of the association taken into account what will happen when some mother-director discovers that her own son is under surveillance?

If parents want their daughters to marry wisely, their training should begin when, as babies, they cry for things that are not good for them. The mother and father who surrender good judgment to foolish sentiment, then, will find themselves facing an established precedent when Daughter wants the wrong man, after she is grown.

All of the decisions of the Parental Surveillance Association of North America, if sustained with a whoop by all the mothers and fathers in the world, will not change such a daughter's decision.

The Parental Surveillance Association of North America should gather up its microscopes and reports and adjourn from the parlor to the nursery. There is where the trouble begins.