

WATCH the CURVES



BY RICHARD HOFFMANN
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W.N.U. SERVICE

SYNOPSIS

Following his father's bitter criticism of his idle life, and the notification that he need not expect any immediate financial assistance, Hal Ireland, only son of a wealthy banker, finds himself practically without funds but with the promise of a situation in San Francisco, which city he must reach, from New York, within a definite time limit. He takes passage via a cross-country auto party on a "share expense" basis. Four of his companions excite his interest: a young, attractive girl, Barry Trafford; middle-aged Giles Kerrigan; Sister Anastasia, a nun; and an individual whom he instinctively dislikes, Martin Crack. Barry's reticence annoys him. In Kerrigan he finds a fellow man-of-the-world, to whom he takes at once. Hal is unable to shake off a feeling of uneasiness. He distrusts Crack, but finds his intimacy with Kerrigan ripening, and he makes a little progress with Barry.

CHAPTER III—Continued

"What business is it going to be?" Kerrigan asked; and Hal liked the implication that the more important things between them would come in their own good time.

"Air business," said Hal. "Expect to be started cleaning boundary lights at the field."

"Envy you," said Kerrigan. "If I had a son, I'd put him in that. Twice a year I give myself a good kicking for not having gone into railroads, at your age." He looked expectantly at Barry.

Her eyes were incurious—as if she hadn't till then thought of anything she could want to ask. And then, without more than the most superficial apology in her tone, she said, "Please don't answer if you'd rather not. The reason I'm asking—the reason stops and I forget I had it, whether you tell me or not. Are you Frederick Ireland's son?"

He tried to force from her clear, polite look a hint of why she wanted to know; but all he could see was confirmation of what she had said: she didn't ask out of idle curiosity, and yet the answer wasn't momentous to her.

"Yes, I am," he said.

She believed him, but it gave her nothing to think about. And Hal swore he would find out why she had asked that of him if he had to back her into a corner on the last day and shake her firm shoulders till she told him. No, not shake them; hold them, perhaps, but not shake them. And it should be before the last day, too. I wonder, he said to himself, if you'd tell me why you wanted to know that, without my even asking you. If you weren't so good to look at, Miss Trafford, you probably wouldn't be making so much trouble for yourself.

"I've met your father," said Kerrigan, without special significance.

"Have you?" said Hal. "Where?"

"In Paris," said Kerrigan. "When Wilson came over the first time. Were you with him?"

"No," said Hal; "I wasn't."

But Hal was wondering why, when it had never come hard to take challenges, he should shy at the prospect of later pretending to this girl that he was in love with her. She knew her way round; he had never seen her before and would probably never—Hal interrupted himself with a fresh wonder: why couldn't he easily conceive of not seeing her again? A little more than twenty-four hours it was, since they'd started; he didn't even know what she looked like with her hat off. Oh, the hell with it; just remember how easily she can make you mad and don't go Travelers' Aid till you have to.

Straight roads long-laid across the flatness of Ohio, with the sultry, flat afternoon in a hazy layer between the land and the stubbornly moving sun. Then Kerrigan saw "Detroit" on a signboard at less than a hundred miles. Perhaps two hours more; and even if the ease of relief was rolling in now with every mile, the thing to do was push straight on without stopping, whether stark hunger overtook the Pulsiphers or not.

"Say," came Crack's drowsy, confidential whisper near Hal's ear. Hal turned his head a little, his attention in alert suspense. "We could eat in Detroit," Crack said in softly impish conspiracy. "Run right through, we could—not give this bird another chance to try a quick one." Hal made himself ignore the coincidence; he nodded briefly and said, "Good idea."

If Crack, basking in the secret sunshine of his own little schemes, could be made uneasy, there must be something more to Miller's influence than Hal liked to allow.

In the next rising of talk behind

them Hal leant a little toward Kerrigan and murmured: "Is there anything about that fella that—?" He thought he saw understanding in Kerrigan's eyes and turned back to the road without finishing.

But Kerrigan said, "Which fella?" curiously. Hal glanced at him again quickly: the brown eyes still seemed to understand what he meant. And Hal dismissed the subject gingerly muttering, "Later, later."

Across the Maumee and through the fringes of Toledo. It grew dark slowly; then the sprawl of a city began to infringe upon the openness, gradually and in disorder.

"Dearborn," Crack suddenly whispered, and Hal wondered why it sounded exciting, even faintly sinister.

"You sorta feel things goin' on here," said Crack, quietly behind Hal's head. "Don't you?"

"Yes, you do," said Hal.

"I like Detroit," Crack said in shy complacency. "I used to work here."

Hal had a quick curiosity to know what it was Crack had worked at; but something suggested that if he had asked, the lazy, immature voice wouldn't tell him the truth.

It was nearly ten o'clock—the night breathless, the pavement still remembering the sun's complacency—when they rolled into Cadillac square.

CHAPTER IV

Thursday.

HAL had some difficulty reaching his friend next morning, and it was nearly one when he brought Kerrigan down from their room to see what he'd got.

"Really ought to look at it first through an old snapshot negative," said Hal. "Your eyes do better if you take these things gradually."

It was a great locomotive of a car—a certain high rectness, the small hubs and the spindly spokes proclaiming venerability; but deep green and bright brass, the pale taupe of the upholstery, the miniature lamps beside the doors, with a little red star in each side-glass, made its venerability that of an aristocrat who could ignore the fickleness of styles. Kerrigan looked and his eyes softened affectionately.

"Shades of Dempsey and Willard," he breathed. "What is it? A Martin day-bomber without the wings?"

"Nineteen twenty-three," said Hal. "Belonged to the mother of one of



He Looked Expectantly at Barry.

the directors and never been driven over forty. Cared for like an only child. Look at that upholstery."

Kerrigan looked and stroked. "Kings ride on fabric less rich," he said. "They left the engine in it, I s'pose. But why Texas license plates?"

"Only ones they had handy. Thought it'd be interesting to drive from Michigan to California with Texas plates and a New York driving license. But the motor's sweet—sweet's a nut."

The solid, multiple chunk of the closing door drew an exclamation of awe from Kerrigan. He said, "You don't think I'll be embarrassed, riding up so high?"

"You'll find you see more of the country," said Hal.

"Right over the heads of the crowds that gather; true, true. It's a wonder we're alive. Tell me more: how much does the museum want for it?"

"Three hundred. And the tires,

look at the tires—made of rubber, they are, and practically new. And everything works: the speedometer, even the cigar lighter."

"What's the ralling up on top? Widow's walk?"

"No, that's the laundry yard," said Hal. "Colonel, if I didn't know you so well, I'd almost think you were making fun of—of . . ."

"Chucho! there—y-see?" said Kerrigan. "You've gone and bought us a car and don't know what to call it. S'pose the others had come before it was named. The ignominy! We better go up and throw out a horn from the quart an old dog-fancier left in my pocket this morning. Got to christen it."

"Drink?" said Hal. "At noon? Kerrigan, what d'you think I am?"

Kerrigan's eyes were merry. "Just about what you seem," he said, taking Hal's elbow and turning him round.

"Rasputin" had become the car's name by the time the travelers were ready to start. They were shown Rasputin in his timeless green-and-brass distinction. John smiled loftily, rocking back on his heels as if he were taking the air on the deck of his yacht; and Mrs. Pulsipher made a little exclamation of surprise, clasped her hands in front of her as if to be sure she wouldn't touch the paint, and gave Hal a look of interest and respect.

"Oh, it's elegant," she said. "Oh my, it's beautiful."

Barry and Sister Anastasia came up and Barry's look ran out to Hal in unguarded confidence. She came to his side to admire, and her low voice said, "Ah, it's a sweet old thing."

"Like it?" said Hal, showing her his pleasure.

"Mm," she said. "It'll be fun, won't it? And we can light the little carriage lamps sometimes, can't we?"

Hal chuckled at her more delightfully than he meant to. "Bet we can," he said. "And you shall have 'em—to keep—when we get there."

She looked at his lips, then up at his eyes—securely, expectantly, on the point of letting him pass another of the intangible defenses. But then she said only, "Why don't we start?"

"Because that miserable fella Crack isn't here," said Hal, and the brief confidence that had lain between their eyes lost itself.

Barry turned her back on the others, slipped her hand lightly inside Hal's arm, and he crooked it as they took a slow step or two away.

"How long do you think it should take to Los Angeles?" Barry asked him.

Hal returned the gravity of her eyes, all the while conscious of the casual resting of her hand on his arm, as if sensation paused throughout his body except just there where she touched him. And he wasn't sure he wholly matched her casualness as he said: "I hadn't figured it closely. It's about twenty-five hundred miles. Six days would be fairly brisk. Why, Barry? Do you want to hurry?"

Her look coolly disavowed any plea for herself. "You won't say anything if I tell you why Sister Anastasia"—her low mention of it was quite as lyric, tender, as the nun's had been—"is going to the Coast. She has a brother—at the Santa Barbara mission. He's dying. He wants her there before he dies—to forgive him for something wrong he thinks he did to her a long time ago. She's so patient, so good, so—humble isn't the word, because that sometimes means things not always brave and fine. She wouldn't say anything to you, but it's so much to her. I'm sure she hasn't heard anything for a long time. She doesn't know whether he's dead now."

Hal wanted to keep her hand touching his arm until he found the remark that would open some small slit of intimacy in her thoughtful, faintly anxious look. But all he said was, "D—n that Crack."

She watched him an instant longer, as if she expected him to say something else. Then she looked down at his mouth; her hand slipped from his arm and she turned round.

And d—n me, too, he said to himself, for letting that minute get away from me. What is it comes over you, Ireland, you yokel?

Lunch was not only eaten but digested, the luggage was all up on the widow's walk under a spanking new tarpaulin, and still Crack hadn't come. Hal, squatting on Rasputin's roof, murmured down to Kerrigan, "H—l with him. Let's leave his bag and his fare and shove off."

Casually Barry said, "I don't think that'd be fair—to leave him, do you?"

"Why not?" said Hal. "If we make a couple of hundred miles before bedtime, we might be one night less on the road."

Conviction backed up Barry's casual look at Kerrigan, and Hal's obstinacy rose.

"But suppose—" Barry began, and Kerrigan interrupted, "Here he comes."

Barry lifted Doc under her arm and got into the car without hurry, as if her stand about Crack hadn't really mattered to her. Hal vaulted to the pavement as Crack came up, and said to him, "Any day this week, young fella. Where the devil have you been?"

Crack flushed. "Awfully sorry," he said. "I got delayed, awful sorry." His hand came from his

crack pocket and he dropped his look modestly to watch the golf-ball fall to the pavement, and bounce up to his hand again. Then, as if Hal were the only one to share an understanding of the ways of the world, he said, "Had to telegraph New York. Business. The answer was slow comin' back."

He wasn't as young as he superficially looked, Hal decided; it wasn't only his old-fashioned air—straight-brushed hair and jacket buttoned high to the small opening—that gave him maturity. And whatever bemused his light, drowsy eyes remained private to them not wholly through shyness. Telegraph New York on business and wait for an answer.

It went through Hal's mind quickly and vividly. Like something



"Had to Telegraph New York. Business. The Answer Was Slow Comin' Back."

he had thought of before and forgotten, and there was no pause before he said, "Get in. Your bag's up."

Crack looked up at the rack, then along the length of the car, immune to hurry.

"Nice car," he said shyly, as if he knew something about it that Hal didn't.

They had gone 20 miles westward when Pulsipher gave a lost wall of dismay. "That man—that man,"

"Good Gad, sir, what man?" asked Kerrigan.

"He's not here," John said, his desperation rising. "We left him behind. That driver. That Miller. Our fares."

All previous discussion of the matter—of Miller's dismissal and Hal's possession of the fares—had flown past John's ears, it turned out. And as Kerrigan explained it, among eager oh's and ah's of understanding, Hal became aware that he had undertaken responsibility of a sort here. Where, forty-eight hours ago, he hadn't given a Continental whether any of them got anywhere or not, he was now being trusted to land them all in Los Angeles safe, soon, and at no further expense. It gave him an odd feeling near the pit of his stomach—not to be defined at all—before he forgot it.

Dusk came early because of the shredded-cotton comforter of cloud low under the sky; and when they turned south at Coldwater for the Indiana border there was a warm rain-smelling breeze. It was agreed to push on a little farther, giving the weather of his mind a chance to make up its mind. And promptly it made up its mind to drench water down upon the world.

A pair of brilliant headlights moved toward them through the dark rain; a truck and trailer, enormous, with wide top lights and a line of little green crystals along its side. Hal eased the accelerator farther, bending forward to keep track of the road's edge. Then, made startling as physical assault for all its quiet, Crack's whisper sounded behind him: "Stop it—brakes; easy!" There was nothing to see, but Hal gave the brake pedal intermittent touches, cursing the groundless authority in that whisper as he did it. The headlights thundered past, and there in the rain-streaked glare close ahead, a figure in a gleaming poncho rode a bicycle. Hal swung aside for him, feeling a confused emptiness hold his chest for an instant, telling himself he was finished with that uneasy premonition, that sense of portent. He partly turned his head to ask Crack, "How the deuce did you see him?" Crack didn't answer at once; after a little, his whisper came, drowsing again in shy satisfaction: "I—I just sorta—saw him."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Haifa Is Modern City

Haifa is the principal port of Palestine, and is a modern city, being little more than a century old. From Mount Carmel, above the city, the view embraces half of Palestine. Mount Carmel was one of the resorts of the Prophet Elijah, and on the mountain may be seen the School of the Prophets, a large, partly artificial cavern, in which it is said the Holy Family rested on the return from Egypt.

CRIMINALS MADE OVER PHYSICALLY WHILE IN PRISON

If your nose is crooked and you yearn to be an Adonis, or you have a twisted leg, and fain would walk like other men, then rob a gas station or forge a check, and when—or if—you get out of state's prison you may have a Greek profile and two perfectly good legs.

That is, if you remember to commit the crime in Connecticut. For they're doing remarkable things in the state prison at Wethersfield. As one convict puts it, with awe, "They're improving on the acts of God!"

John Dillinger, public enemy No. 1, had his face lifted, and there were streaming headlines across the nation's newspapers. But much more fundamental plastic surgery is being done, unnoted, behind the turreted walls down on Wethersfield Cove. Men leave the prison so changed that their best friends don't know them.

Of course, there's one fundamental difference—that Dillinger had his physiognomy made over by quacks, to avoid the law, whereas the man in Wethersfield is reconstructed by the law itself, in an attempt to obliterate those stigmata that label him convict.

Penologists may insist that the "babyface" is equally as likely to be a killer as is the man with the bashed-in nose and the prognathous

jaw. But popular psychology still accepts ugliness as synonymous with turpitude, and distorted features as an indication of depravity. The man who is born with or acquires by accident the type of countenance that the law-abiding citizen associates with crime is licked before he starts. He looks like a criminal.—Marian Murray in the American Mercury.

The Ruins

The sad-looking man in the tenement area leaned over the banisters and caught the visitor before she could disappear down a hole in the staircase.

"I wonder," said the visitor indignantly, "the landlord doesn't do something to repair this deplorable building?"

"Well," said the slum dweller, philosophically, "he was going to do something about it until he went on a tour to Naples and saw the ruins of Pompeii. Now he thinks this isn't too bad."—London Tit-Bits.

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I SUPPOSE HE'S TOLD YOU I'M RICH, SO YOU THINK HE'S QUITE A CATCH!

GOOD! IF SHE REALLY LOVES HIM THAT REMARK WILL HURT!

SHE PUT ME THROUGH COLLEGE AND LAW SCHOOL, HONEY, AND HANDLING HER AFFAIRS IS THE BIGGEST JOB I HAVE

WELL—THEN WE'D BETTER GIVE IT ALL UP, JACK! I LOVE YOU ... BUT YOUR AUNT ... WE COULD NEVER BE HAPPY!

POOR AUNT LUCY, SHE DOESN'T MEAN TO BE CROSS, BUT HER HEADACHES AND INDIGESTION MAKE HER SO IRRITABLE!

PROMISE ME YOU'LL TELL HER WHAT I TOLD YOU, DEAR... IT REALLY MAY BE COFFEE-NERVES!

MARY'S MOTHER HAD YOUR TROUBLE ONCE! SHE CUT OUT COFFEE AND TRIED POSTUM. THE CHANGE WORKED WONDERS! WON'T YOU TRY IT, AUNT LUCY?

OH, MERCY! I WILL... IF YOU'LL JUST STOP RAVING ABOUT MARY!

CURSES! I KNEW THAT GIRL MARY WAS UP TO NO GOOD! NOW I'LL HAVE TO DUCK!

WASN'T IT NICE OF AUNT LUCY TO GIVE US THIS CRUISE FOR A WEDDING PRESENT?

SHE'S BEEN JUST TOO WONDERFUL FOR WORDS SINCE SHE SWITCHED TO POSTUM!

30 DAYS LATER

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