

The Girl Beyond the Trail

perhaps—more potent than his love and his own strong will."

Father Roland nodded.

"I understand," he said, and he sank back farther in his corner by the window, so that his face was shrouded a little in shadow. "This other man loved a woman, too. And she was beautiful. He thought she was the most beautiful thing in the world. It is great love that makes beauty."

"But this woman—my friend's wife—was so beautiful that even the eyes of other women were fascinated by her. I have seen her when it seemed as though she must have come fresh from the hands of angels; and at first, when my friend was the happiest man in the world, he was fond of telling her that it must have been angels who put the colour in her face and the wonderful golden fires in her shining hair. It wasn't his love for her that made her beautiful. She *was* beautiful."

"And her soul?" softly questioned the shadowed lips of the missionary.

The other's hands tightened slowly.

"In making her the angels forgot a soul, I guess," he said.

"Then your friend did not love her." The little forest missionary's voice was quick and decisive. "There can be no love where there is not a soul."

"That is impossible. He did love her. I know it."

"I still disagree with you. Without knowing your friend, I say that he worshipped her beauty. There were others who worshipped that same loveliness—others who did not possess her, and who would have bartered their souls for her had they possessed souls to barter. Is that not true?"