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THE GIRL BEYOND THE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

A WOMAN'S LAUGHTER

IF you had stood there in the edge of the black spruce forest, with the wind moaning dismally through the twisting trees—midnight of deep December—the Transcontinental would have looked like a thing of fire; dull fire, glowing with a smouldering warmth, but of strange ghostliness and out of place. It was a weird shadow, helpless and without motion, and black as the half Arctic night save for that band of illumination that cut it in twain from the first coach to the last, with a space like an inky hyphen where the baggage car lay. Out of the north came armies of snow-laden clouds that scudded just above the earth, and with these clouds came now and then a shrieking mockery of wind to taunt this stricken creation of man and the creatures it sheltered—men and women who had begun to shiver, and whose tense, white faces stared with increasing anxiety out into the mysterious darkness of the night that hung like a sable curtain ten feet from the car windows.

For three hours those faces had peered out into the night. Many of the prisoners in the snow-bound