



TRAILS' END by AGNES LOUISE PROVOST

FIRST INSTALLMENT
was not real. It was a cas-
covey brittle glass, and it was
g and splintering all around
g in the cream-colored
r tried to realize it in all
implications, tried to see her
ru the bristling wreckage
had closed in on her.
gs didn't happen like that;
imply didn't. To some, per-
o the reckless and hard-boiled
id things that invited disaster;
in excitement and wild parties.
girls who led normal, healthy
and did the usual pleasant,
ble things, and were thrilled
over their work and the
chance of success in it. It
not happen.
it had. What was she going
about it?
girl kept haunted young eyes
e road ahead, mechanically ef-
while her thoughts darted and
d hunting frantically for a way
The speedometer needle trem-
at sixty, and slid back to forty-
She must not drive too fast,
isk being stopped for speeding.
ll times, not now.
r the first time the firm little
r on the wheel slackened and
t, but she steadied them again
tly. The roadster hummed
ly on. The wind that rushed by
face was sharp with the night
and damp with the smell of the
ic. Long fingers of light reach-
out for her and were dimmed;
ndescript car rattled past, its
r sending a curious glance at
e roadster with the pretty
at the wheel, alone.
o in on her cheek was notice-
wot, bringing its own message.
in fog was creeping in from the
Presently it would be thicker,
see white blanket. She saw its
lly whiteness closing silently
nd a dark beach bungalow, miles
c of her, shrouding it, hiding it,
thering sight and sound.
here were no lights in the bun-
w to beat thru in a golden haze.
saw it as she had last seen it,
sk in shadow, dark and furtive on
strip of sheltered beach. A sil-
ette against the pale rectangle
a door. A man's silhouette.
demories came like black wings,
oping down on her. Other things
hings that were said. She didn't
nt to think of them.
The road curved again. She saw
single light ahead, and her own
adlights picked up a motorcycle
wn to one side of the highway,
d a man in uniform bending over
A motorcycle policeman. He
ked up, with a professional eye
the on coming car.
She wanted to step on the gas
d go roaring past him, but she
n't. Somehow she stopped. Some-
w she kept her voice cool and
atural.
'Any trouble, officer? Can I call
a garage for you—or anything?'
'Why, no, lady. Much obliged.'
The man in uniform was disillusioned and hard-boiled, but he grin-
ed appreciatively at the small crea-
re offering help. Drivers of speedy
rs didn't usually waste much grief
er a motor cop stalled by the road-
de. And this was a pretty girl,
rtly even for this favored strip of
e coast, where pretty girls flocked
rom all over the country. A little
hng, with big soft eyes and a red
eret pulled at a gallant angle over
small, dark head. Looked like a
ice kid, for all she was tearing
round the country alone at this
our of the night. A swell car, too;
t must have cost a handful of mon-
y. Later he was to remember that
ar, and the girl who had driven it.
He swung a sturdy leg over his
saddle.
'Better detour inland if you're
going far. The fog's getting thick
back there. Driving's going to be
ted before long.'
'Thanks, I'll remember.'
She smiled, and the cream-colored
roadster slid past him. Fog, and
dangerous driving along the coast
road. It was so very simple.
She had been up and down this
road a score of times since the new
roadster had been hers. She knew
its curves, its grades, its ragged
coast line. She knew, now, where
she was going. The speedometer
needle crept a little higher.
A road appeared, branching from
the main highway. Tall trees march-
ed along each side of it, and a
denser planting showed ahead. In
the darkness beneath the trees she
brought the roadster to a standstill
and let her hands drop from the
wheel.
It was lucky that she had re-
membered this place. So accessible
and yet so secluded, with no curious
eyes to see the queer preparations
that she had to make.—Funny how
wobbly she felt, now that she could
just drop back and let go.—It would
never do. She must get herself in
band, keep her head clear and her
nerve steady.
It was not so easy. She seemed
to be two people, and one of them
was a sly, persistent imp which hov-
ered close to her ear, hearing and

Trail's End. She liked the sound of
that. Remoteness. Safety. Home.
And work, of course.
Marston Station baked in the af-
ternoon sunshine. Northeast and
southwest the long line of rails
winked and flashed to a disappear-
ing glimmer. Southward, beyond
the limits of the little town, dun-
colored desert sand stretched on and
on, shimmering with heat and dotted
sparsely with the low, greyed brush
of the waterless lands. To the north
and northwest lay a similar stretch,
cut off obliquely by an abrupt line
of hills.
Near the sun-baked station the
town of Marston straggled inform-
ally, a single dusty street with a
few dwindling offshoots on each side.
In the door of the postoffice a young
man appeared, looking up the road
toward the station. He was tall and
sun-browned, but without the weath-
er-beaten desert dried look. He had
an arrogant nose with pride in every
line of it, rather nice gray eyes,
clear and steady, and a pleasant,
finely curved mouth, curiously at
war with the prideful nose. He
caught sight of a shabby automobile
over by the station, and a faint grin
twinked at the corners of his mouth.
He was wondering what some people
of his acquaintance would say if
they ever came to Marston and had
to be met by that car.
'It looks like an old hobo,' he
reflected, 'but Petry loves it like a
baby.—Guess I'll go over and wait
there.'
He strolled on down the dusty
street. It was by no means a crowd-
ed street but the few people he met
all seemed to know him. Their
greetings were friendly, altho per-
haps not so jocular as they might
have been, say to Boone Petry, who
worked for him, or to Jim Bagley,
who kept the general store, or any
of the few scattered ranch owners
who occasionally came in for sup-

gles Perch and the little ranch
where the Simpson family dribbled
out its happy-go-lucky existence.
'What's happened?' he inquired
mildly. 'Somebody leave Sim ten
dollars or did he just get too ex-
hausted to work?'
'Don't talk about a triflin' ten
dollars to Lonzo. He's sold his
place, and from the general excite-
ment in the Simpson family I'd say
it must've been a pretty good cash
payment.'
The jar of the two-thirty-eight
closed the conversation abruptly.
Number Twelve clanked to a stop
with a long sigh. Petry looked along
the line of dusty coaches, nodded
familiarly to the brakeman, gallant-
ly laden with somebody's suitcases,
and started toward the forward end.
Then he stopped, as abruptly as tho
he had been jerked at the end of a
halter.
Silken ankles and beautifully shod
feet were coming down the gritty
steps of old Number Twelve. Petry
looked up dizzily at a slim young
woman clad trimly in blue. She was
appealingly young and she had the
loveliest skin that Boone had ever
seen and an engaging little mouth
which looked rather sober just now
but would surely show lovely teeth
when she smiled, and lustrous big
eyes with a growing dismay in them
as they looked beyond the little sta-
tion toward the forlorn straggle of
houses which constituted the town
of Marston. That was Marston's
first glimpse of Anne Cushing as
she stepped from the two-thirty-eight
directly into the path of Boone Petry,
ex-cowman, ex-ranchman and
general factotum to Barry Duane.
Involuntarily he swept off his bat-
tered hat, showing a grizzled head,
a skin weathered to a leathery
brown and light blue eyes which
gave him a deceptively innocent air.
The girl smiled at him. Some of
et neighborly visiting between Fa-



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