

The 24,000-Mile Adventure of a Lady Hobo



"I have slept in hay lofts without the slightest fear."

While her more theoretical sisters were agitating for equal economic rights and freedom before society and the law, Katherine Jackson of Hudson, New York, and the world, went out and settled over night the feminist problem, so far as it concerned herself. Today she is free and independent, she wants for nothing, and she calls no man master.

Katherine Jackson solved the woman's problem by literally taking to the road just as any hobo would do. First, she led the vagabond's life according to a strictly feminine interpretation; that is, she sometimes traveled in luxury and often was known to leave one town dressed in greasy overalls and show up in the next wearing silk stockings and a nicely tailored coat-suit. But she was a hobo and always took a hobo's chances and shared the hobo's luck.

This girlish vagabond is known as "The Queen of the Hoboes," an appellation that was applied to her by members of her own profession and which was used officially when she acted as the companion of Jeff Davis, the "King of the Hoboes," during the latter's activities in behalf of the "Victory Loan."

Why did she do it? You wonder. Wanderlust is her answer. What she did and how she did it, is herewith told in her own language.

BY KATHERINE JACKSON.

WHY do they call me the queen of the hoboes? That's not a hard question to answer. In the first place, because I am a hobo; in the second place, because I am a woman and never did less or more than a true woman would, in all my experiences on the road. To the extent that every true woman is a queen so am I a queen.

Of course, I was forced to endure a few indignities, but most of these were in the big cities, where any woman, I regret to say, is likely to be insulted when she is by herself. But in all my experiences with hoboes I have never known one to be anything but a good pal. I was never cheated and never insulted, even in the many cases where I was a lone girl among a number of men—and they knew it.

My first real experience in traveling on my own hook was when I was 13 years old. I didn't realize it then, but I am inclined to think now that the real reason I made that adventurous trip was because I had the wanderlust. But at any rate, I had a good reason for going.

When I was a very little girl I lived with my mother at Hudson, N. Y. One day my father disappeared without any explanation and we heard nothing of him for five years. Then a letter came from a friend of ours saying that my father had been seen in a little town in Austria. I then quietly made up my mind to go and get him, and without consulting my mother, started out.

I had a little money of my own and I used this. How I ever got on board the steamer without being stopped is a mystery now. I suppose the officials believed me when I said I was 18. I was very large for my age and had no trouble in getting accommodations.

When we arrived at Trieste I was still far from my destination, which was a little village called Revasiglet in the interior of Austria. In order to make the journey I was forced to sell some of my extra clothing, and when I arrived my father had disappeared again.

Developed Hunger for Travel.

There I was, 4000 miles away from home—without friends and without money. But I took my courage in my hands and started back. I accomplished the trip with surprising



A daily foot bath adds much to the joy of hobo life.

ease. I worked in various capacities and traveled in all kinds of conveyances. But I finally got back to Hudson, safe and sound and not very much different except that I had developed an incurable hunger for gaudy places, seeing things and keeping out in the open.

At the time, though, I tried to persuade myself that I was going to stay at home and be like other girls, and I was doing that very successfully until Tom left. I'll have to explain here that Tom was the man I afterward married. We were very much in love and it wrung my heart to see him go. But he had accepted a position in Atlanta, Ga., and had made all his plans.

I walked down to the station with him; we kissed a tearful good-bye, and I vowed to wait until he could send for me. A good many months passed and I missed my Tom more and more every day. One day I decided to go to Atlanta. I had no money, so there was nothing to do but take to the road.

In my European trip I hadn't had much experience with freight cars because I had paid my way along by working. But as it happened this time, I ran into a knight of the road, almost as soon as I had left our little village behind. He gave me some good advice.

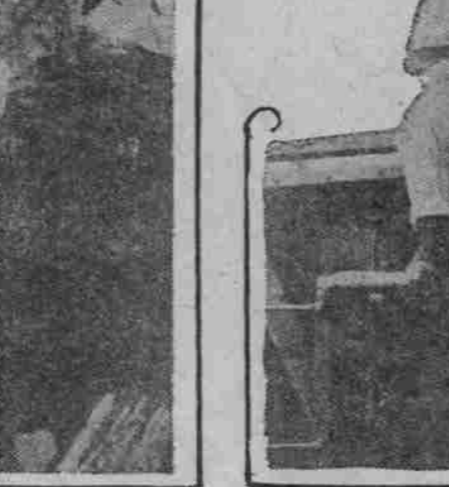
"Go down near the water tank and hide in the bushes, child," he said. "When the train stops for water you look for an open door. Don't jump aboard until you see the stoker lifting the big hose pipe out of the engine's tank. Then you'll know that the job is finished and that they'll start again soon."

I followed his advice and was soon speeding toward New York. Late that afternoon we passed over the drawbridge that spans the Harlem river and a mile farther on we stopped. I climbed out and tramped into New York. I was in the big city several days and picked up a few odd jobs. But I was soon ready to press on.

Tom Had Left for the West.

My success in "grabbing a rattler" at Hudson emboldened me to try my luck again in Jersey City. But the yards were too well guarded. I took to the road again, but when I got well outside the range of Hackensack meadows I located a car that was bound southward and climbed on.

Every conceivable sort of adventure happened to me between that point and my destination—Atlanta. In Culpepper county, Virginia, which was my first stop after leaving Jersey, I got work on a farm. The farmer's son proposed marriage to me at



With the aid of a slight imagination, hoboeing is just like motoring 'cross country in one's own private car.

I had been there a week. I moved on and thereafter during the trip wore overalls and passed as a boy. In North Carolina I joined a gang of hoboes and shared their "slum" for two days and picked up many a trick of swinging into a car, lying across the rods and straddling the bumpers.

I finally reached Atlanta. With beating heart I approached the address Tom had sent me. But disappointment was in store for me. The landlady told me he had left two weeks before for Denver to try to rebuild his failing health. I was greatly perturbed. I started out again, after a few days' rest.

When I left home I was dressed in a substantial cloth suit and good, stout, low-heeled shoes. I carried a change of linen and underclothing in a small pack. In Virginia I exchanged my suit for overalls—but in Atlanta, after working for a while in

restaurants, I made enough to buy a really smart-looking suit, which I added to my bundle. In that way I was able to alternate as a boy and a girl. On the road I was a boy much of the time, but when I went into the towns I was a girl. After starting out I made a long jump from Marietta, Ga., to Little Rock, Ark., without once seeing a railroad hand. From Little Rock to Wichita, Kan., however, my road was a rough one. I was twice thrown off trains. The greater part of that trip was made with the kindly aid of farmers who gave me lifts from time to time.

At Wichita I ran into a college boy who had been working in the wheat fields. With his assistance I made a rapid jump straight into Denver—only to land in the arms of a policeman. I certainly pleaded hard with the cop and finally prevailed on him to let me loose. An hour later I was

for tomorrow, counted for nothing. Tomorrow, for the first time, he would begin to live.

It was 3 o'clock the next afternoon before Lon and his bride left the Prewitts, and started home, her trunk, sewing machine and big box in the wagon behind the seat. As the scattering houses of the village were left behind, Lon put his arm about Edna and searched her eyes.

"At last!" His voice shook with the marvel of it, "Oh, Edna!"

"Yes, we are on the way home, at last," she whispered, her eyelids drooping, to hide tears of joy and of sadness.

In this moment the culmination of so many postponements, of such scathing delays, they had not many words to say. They rode on in silence, while flocks of silver-flecked clouds sent shadows chasing across the wide, sated prairie. To the westward a black drift hung on the horizon. Once Lon remarked that it looked like rain.

"If it waits till we get home we'll not care—let it rain," Edna's laugh rippled with new happiness as she laughed with her. Suddenly she lifted her head from his shoulder to glance about and cry: "Why, Lon, I didn't know there was a railroad near here!"

"There isn't." Then he, too, caught the roar and rumbling of a mighty train. He turned quickly. From the west a dense black cloud was sweeping toward them with the speed and the scream of a demon train.

"Yes, it's a cyclone," he answered Edna's gasping word, while he used

Charming Katherine Jackson, Queen of the "Rattler Grabbers," Who Ran Away Because She Had the Wanderlust, Tells of Her Thrills and Thirsts, and Why Men Are Not a Serious Risk After All.



Above—Sketch of Miss Jackson by a hobo artist pal. Left—"Always wait until the freight is ready to pull out before you jump aboard."

Right—The view from the top of a freight is better than from a Pullman platform. Provided your eye is cinder-proof.



Miss Jackson preferred an outside sleeper when weather was favorable.

in another man's arms—but it was the arms of my lover, Tom, this time. We were married that fall.

Right here I would like to say a word of defense of hoboes generally. Contrary to the general belief, he is not a man who is running away from work. He works all the time and at various odd jobs, in order to pay his way as he goes. He performs these odd jobs conscientiously, too.

In many cases he is a man of education who has been disappointed in love or business or who is simply tired of staying in one place. In all cases he is a man who is unwilling to call any man master or to be slave to any thimble task.

All in all, I have traveled more than 24,000 miles on foot, by rail and in vehicles of many different kinds. My invariable dodge when I am seeking work along the roadside is to tell the farmer or his wife or the

storekeeper or whoever it happens to be, that I am going to visit an aunt in the next town ahead. This is a little white lie, but it satisfies their curiosity. Country folk are not nearly as curious as those in the city, anyhow. And their food is so much better.

Has Never Regretted a Single Day.

Incidentally I soon learned to love the tramp's dish—which is an agglomeration of everything you can find. I also learned to cook over brushwood fires and to heat a tin can full of coffee with a couple of matches while riding in a freight car. And I have made many friends. I am known all over America now by the fraternity.

I have never regretted a single day of my life on the road. Though I would hardly advise other girls to take it up, it is much easier on a woman than a man. Everything is



Katherine Jackson, the "hobo queen."



There are times when even a hobo has to prepare a meal, you know.



Traveling freight disguised as a boy.

in her favor. It is easier to get the kind of work a hobo wants to do and people generally are more kindly disposed toward a girl than a man. I think. Certainly they have been very kind to me and very considerate, too. In all my travels I have never had reason to fear anything—and I slept in the same haystack with two strange men one night. I have known how to take care of myself, it is true, but one would expect many more advances than I ever received. Perhaps I have been lucky, but all the men with whom I was ever thrown seemed to want to help me to the limit of their powers. Another thing before I forget it. When a hobo needs help he always applies to people in humble circumstances. They give him assistance much quicker than the rich ones.

How old am I, you ask. Well, I am more than 25 and less than 25. That's close enough, isn't it? And I'm not what you would call had looking, if I do say it myself. If you don't believe me, look at the pictures on this page.

THE CYCLONE BY ROSE L. ELLERBE

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his walls covered with the cheapest of paper—a trailing vine pattern, with pink and blue flowers. Somehow that had seemed to belong to Edna. The bedstead and the dresser were of the shiniest—they had given up the wedding of home to pay for that "suite."

"I'll look scrumptious when she gets her little gim-cracks around," he told himself with a smile. As he moved toward the back door he spoke out loud:

"It's convenient and comfortable—and she'll make it beautiful! And it's all paid for—there ain't any mortgages, or debt, thank God!"

His thanksgiving was so devout that he took off his cap and paused, a somber light in his steady eyes.

"She shan't never work herself to death the way mother did," he was thinking. "It's been hard—all-fired hard for both of us, waiting so long—five years! But I'm glad I stuck it out. Now we are beginning right, anyway." At this moment he was surer than ever of that.

The fixity of the frozen plains was in the sturdy form and strongly blocked face of the man, as he joggled over the half-thawed road. Yet his thoughts were leaping forward tumultuously. Tomorrow Edna would step from the train to his arm!

Tomorrow Edna would be his wife! Tomorrow she would come to the house he had built for her! In this hour, the past—that had so long and painfully prepared—or hindered—the way

both hands to hold his plunging team. He turned again toward the hurtling mass whose ravening breath was already brushing their faces.

"Get out and lie flat on the ground," he directed. Before she could obey the cloud veered and roared away to the northeast.

"It's gone over," his voice was wavery.

"Is it going toward home?" she questioned anxiously. "Oh, no!" he admitted. "But a vagrant twister like that never does any harm. It'll hit the ground somewhere or peter out in this air."

Lon drove more rapidly after this. He pointed out the Prossers' house as they passed—a dim light within.

"I must go and see Molly soon," Edna said. "I feel as if I knew her already—and the baby, too."

At last the team swung into a swifter trot of their own accord. "We are almost there," Baxter spoke tensely. He had felt all the time that he should not be sure this was his own Edna—the woman of his hopes and desire—until he had crossed the threshold of their home, until he had heard her first words of understanding and appreciation.

Edna, looking ahead eagerly through veiling twilight, made out the bulk of the barn. Then Lon drew up the horses so sharply that she was almost pitched out of her seat. Dropping the reins with an inarticulate sound that made her heart stop beating, he leaped from the wagon and ran on ahead. After a confused,

frightened moment she climbed down and ran after him. She stumbled over a board; her feet tripped on scattered brick.

She stopped beside her husband, before a jumbled heap, above which a wavering broken column was silhouetted against the sky.

"Oh, Lon," she breathed, "the house—where is it?"

"There!" He thrust out a clenched fist. "There! The cyclone—the cyclone—the house is gone! Our home is gone!" The words were jerked out mechanically from an upheaval too deep for expression.

They stood together before the ruins of their house, stunned, frozen by the catastrophe. At last Lon spoke again:

"It is the hand o' God. The hand o' God has struck us, like it did my folks! Five years—gone—it's the end!" Despair, cold, blank despair had shut down upon his soul.

Edna did not speak. All the strain, all the dullness, all the suffering of the years seemed lumped upon her heart. In that moment the last trace of sweet girlishness died in her face. But—she was here, beside her man. His salvation was in her hands. The rich womanhood of the pioneer mothers of our race blossomed into fullness.

"No, Lon," she spoke quietly and she reached up and laid protecting arms about his stiffened shoulders.

"No, dear, it is not the end. It is only the beginning—the right beginning—together." A sob tore up through the man's

body. He dropped his head to her breast. He gave himself to the comfort of her touch, of her lips, as they murmured broken words of love as they kissed her tear-wet cheeks.

"That's right!" he whispered hoarsely. "That's right! I have been wrong all the time. Edna! Oh, Edna, can you ever forgive me?"

Presently, in the humility of one who has been chastened into recognition of his own finiteness, he went on:

"Tomorrow I will go to the bank and ask for a loan—enough to build another house."

"No, you won't, Lon!" Edna slipped a hand into his and drew him away from the wreck, across the rough ground, until they reached a dimly outlined block at the rear. They paused before the blackness that marked an open door, and Edna finished:

"We will not mortgage our place now, Lon. I've always wanted to live in this dugout, you know. And now I'm going to have my wish. We will just be contented here together until you get another crop and can build again."

Lon Baxter straightened up. The revelation came:

"And that will be this year!" he cried, the strength and courage of youth and love which fate cannot conquer thrilling through the words.

"Working together—like we ought to have been doing all the time—we'll beat this god-damned country yet! We'll build another house next fall, sure!"

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