

That City Gal *æ* by Jack Lait

KITTY HANOVER, song and dance "single" in vaudeville, booked solid for the coming season, with a fat forty weeks behind her, no more home than a rabbit and tired of leaping from one macadamized city to another, turned her pretty eyes Northward toward the Adirondacks.

She might have spent a giddy Summer in New York, for she was fresh, foot-loose and fair, a pet of the public and a favorite in the profession. But Kitty wanted a rest. Theaters and pavements and overtures from the pit and the stage door made her tired. She had never lived in the country and had spent but a few days of her whole young life away from the electric lights and the "improvements" of metropolitan surroundings.

So she called up a newspaper resort bureau and selected at random a place that listened as though it might be divertingly dull and remote. She telegraphed ahead, and woke up among the mountains. At the little station a dusty, rusty old auto met her, and at the wheel was a bright-eyed lad of fourteen. He grinned and giggled as he watched her struggling across the platform with her several heavy bags.

"Phew! I'm Miss Hanover," she panted.
"Yeh—I know," he answered. "I'm Hank."
"Pleased to meet you, Hank. You might have helped me with my baggage."

"Yeh. I might o'—but I didn't. Hop in."
He drove her miles over one of those roads that the ruralites maintain with a special view to keeping motorists away, and landed her with creaking and grinding brakes at the foot of a hill, where she saw the back of a log lodge.

"Here we are," sang Hank.
"Fine! Now you carry my bags."
"Sure. I have to on this end, or ma gives me fits—on the other end she can't see me, so you carry your own."

"You're no chump, Hank," said Kitty.
"Bet I ain't. You think all the slick people live in town? Wait till you're here awhile."

It was rather late in the season, and visitors were thinned out at Hermit's Lake. Impressive foothills of tin cans, empty bottles, excelsior and packing boxes testified, however, that July and August had left their tribute and taken their tithes in rest and recreation. Hank's ma, a worn-looking woman past forty, was running the lodge alone now, though she told Kitty that she had employed half a dozen waitresses and three cooks a month earlier.

"Tain't been a bad Summer," she observed. "We're a little out o' the way here, but we was takin' in as high as a thousan' dollars a week in J'y an' Augus'. We can't get no much help no more, so we couldn' build no two more cottages, like we wanted to, or we'd o' did some better."

Kitty whistled at the figures, for a thousand dollars a week sounded rather big even to her, and her life was cast in a field of quite healthy numbers. But she mentally voted that it was worth almost any reward to be sentenced to life in the wilds. That was before she had spent several evenings on the porch, listening to Mrs. Rawleigh, Hank's ma.

Kitty's eyes were opened at the tales of the gay and fast doings in the woods. It seemed to her that distances were so vast, the facilities for social mingling were so troublesome—how could these folks really endure life, not to speak of enjoying it?

The lake was miles long and more than a mile wide, and not more than a dozen habitations dotted its shores. Back of it, in every direction, were mountains, traversable only over trails invisible until one came right onto them. There was no farming worth mentioning. The whole section seemed to be living off the Summer visitors, and, though these came in goodly numbers during three months each year, it still seemed scarcely possible that they could maintain even the taxes on so enormous a territory.

So it seemed—but Kitty found that the mountaineers not only lived, but waxed wealthy. Board and lodgings, boat rental, hauling to and from the distant depots, guiding and driving sightseers over the awful roadways ran into formidable amounts. And the natives had, somehow, learned all the tricks of applying "extras" in service. Strangers were prey, the open season was short, and they had the long Winters to exchange ideas on how to trim the vacationers.

She learned, from the long talks with Mrs. Rawleigh, that there was no spirit of resignation to the hard backwoods life—not so it could be noticed. The Adirondacks reeked with moonshining, crime, vice and scandal, much of it raw and open and far beyond what would be tolerated in the most shameless and advanced metropolis. The motor roads from Montreal to Manhattan, the most famous bootleggers' trail on earth, ran through the heart of the huge mountain area.

The mountaineers had realized that early. They knew that the rum runners must cruise through their territory. For a spell they made the work more than precarious for the liquor sneakers. Similar to the special constables and sheriffs in the early days of speed laws, when local rural communities appointed officers with power to hold up and fine tourists, the Adirondack counties found that they could man their roads and flag machines for search. Much of this was done in good faith,

but soon crooked individuals turned the situation to their own profit by levying on the booze carriers.

Kitty "made" the whole lake with Hank as her boatsman and guide. The boy knew every hidden rock and every switch of wind and current. He knew just what bait each fish family hungered for at each hour of the day and in every pool. He fell madly in love with Kitty before her first dainty foot had touched the weather-beaten running board of his car, and, being young and unwise as to the courtship methods of the city slickers, he set out to impress

her with his attainments and talents in the woods and on the water.

Hank all but caught the bass with his bare hands and hooked them on Kitty's line. Yet, with the technique that leads boys to pull the hair of the girls they adore and tease them and badger them, Hank never spoke a soft word or a kind one to Kitty; always he "rode" her about her clumsy casting, her amateurish swimming, her fear of harmless snakes and stingless insects, her ludicrous questions regarding the few things he knew about and about which he knew so much.

And when Kitty's vacation was over and he drove her back to the sun-beaten depot, Hank felt sick. For two weeks he had lived for her and on her—on her pretty face and her nifty little figure, on her dainty city ways and on her dependence on him along the trails and in the tricky canoe. Now she was going out of his life, and not all the Winter sports, the gaieties of mountain life in the loafing season, would compensate or console him. Hank was badly wounded.

"Going to carry my bags to the train?" asked Kitty, with a broad smile and a flash of her gleaming teeth.

Hank answered "Aw!"
"Come on—be a sport."
"Aw—for what?"
"I'll give you—I'll give you—"
"You'll gimme what?"
"I'll give you a kiss!"
"Aw—go on... all right, I'll carry 'em... but not for no—not for what you said."

Hank carried the bags to the very spot where the Pullman would land. He stood scratching the brick landing with first one toe and then the other. The train was late, of course. Hank hoped it would be hours late, but it was delayed only a scant forty minutes. They heard it screaming around the curve a mile up the track, and it came crunch-



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ing and gripping into the station. Hank had no further services to render—the porter seized the bags and headed into the car with them. Kitty put out her hand.

"Good-bye, Hank," she said, with a smile that almost tore his heart.

"G'bye," he choked, and he took her hand.

Kitty yanked him to her and printed a smacking kiss squarely on his lips. The flagman called "All aboard!" Kitty waved and mounted the steps. The train began to move down the platform. Hank stood there, watching it pull away. Then he slowly turned and went back to his battered car. And in another minute he was banging and bounding north and the train was gliding and speeding south—and Kitty was reclining back in the cushions and breathing how glad she was to feel again the luxury of civilization, and Hank was biting his lips and cussing the stuttering carburetor.

Into New York, into a taxi, into a modern hotel, into a mahogany suite, into a porcelain tub, went Kitty Hanover next morning, and out of her thoughts and her life went the Adirondacks and the lake and Hank and the parting kiss.

But back on the shores of Hermit's Lake, surrounded by majestic hills that stretched away in every direction and seemed to shut off the little valley from the rest of the world—the world that

held myriad wonders and Kitty—sat Hank Rawleigh.

The scene was as a book with all its pages open to him. He knew that in that little black spot in the water were bass, and they would bite on red artificial flies; he knew that just across the lake was a little trail that the deer ran every morning and twilight for water; he knew that the lake would freeze by Thanksgiving Day and he could skate across to Billy Barlow's cabin, where the old trapper would show him his guns and his trophies and tell him tales of the days of fifty years ago, when he was the pioneer settler on Hermit's Lake, the hermit after whom it was named. He knew that school would open soon and that Lottie Swanstrom, the best looking girl for miles about, and who liked him, too, would be back. He knew that, and much more—

But he knew that his heart was somewhere south, among strange people, the people who weren't any smarter than he was, doggone them—and that his heart burned as his lips tingled. And the next thing Ma Rawleigh knew, Hank had gone off in the car somewhere, and wasn't to be found. When he didn't appear for dinner—a unique occurrence—she grew alarmed. When he failed to come back for supper, she was scared plenty and she ran over to her nearest neighbor's. He drove her to

town, and there they learned that Hank had been seen passing through hours before, speeding southward.

No one seemed able to offer a reasonable solution. Mrs. Rawleigh could think up no reason why Hank should run away. He had been moody, yes, for weeks—but that was characteristic of boys at his age. He had never complained, had never asked for much that he hadn't gotten: what could it be?

Two days later the postmaster drove out to Mrs. Rawleigh and showed her a telegram. It was from the Chief of Police in a town near Albany. A boy had been arrested with a car, inquiring his way to New York. The boy refused to answer any questions. The license number showed it had been issued to a Mrs. Rawleigh at Hermit's Lake. Was the car stolen? The boy was being held pending the postmaster's reply.

"Telegraph him to hold Hank, his mother is coming," answered Mrs. Rawleigh, and she ran for her best dress. She caught a train and a bus, and when she found Hank in the calaboose she threw her arms about him and started to cry.

"Aw, gee—cut it out, ma," protested Hank. "I'm all right."

"Why did you do it?" she wept. "Why did you run away—where were you going?"

"I didn't run away. I jus' thought I'd run down to New York—an' see what it was like, ma. I never seen it, an' I thought—"

"Come on. We'll start right back."

Hank drove back to Hermit's Lake. He went back to school. He said very little about his escapade. He said very little about anything. Hank was a changed boy. Everybody put it down to "that period" when a boy changes into manhood. Nobody ever gave a thought to Kitty, of course, for there had been countless pretty girls at the lake that Summer and every other Summer.

The days were growing short and the shadows were growing long when Mrs. Rawleigh chanced to be reading her Syracuse Sunday paper.

"Look, Hank," she said, glancing up. "Here's a pitcher of a friend o' yours—that city gal you used to tote aroun' the lake."

Hank glanced over her shoulder—and jumped. It was a cut of Kitty Hanover, "Coming—to Keith's."

When Mrs. Rawleigh went to bed Hank snaked the paper and took it to his room. He gazed at it long and earnestly by the light of the oil lamp, for, now that the luxurious city folks were no longer about, electric light made by gasoline motor was a waste. It was Monday night; Kitty was already in Syracuse; she was appearing that evening, perhaps at that moment.

This time Hank took no chances. He would borrow no car nor other identifying impediments. He had money, for the slickers tipped liberally all Summer. He packed up a few things and slipped out of the window, and climbed down the rain pipe in his Sunday pants. It was more than two miles to the station, but he had an hour and twelve minutes to make the night train. So he walked it.

Mrs. Rawleigh was dumfounded when Hank missed breakfast and she found in his room all evidences of his flight. The car stood out in the yard, its year-around garage. The boats were all in place. She drove to town and learned that Hank had taken the mountain limited for Syracuse. This time she did not go after him. It hurt and scared her, but after all, what could happen to him? If the boy was bent on seeing city life, what could she do about it?

She thought of telegraphing the Chief of Police at Syracuse. But what chance was there of the Chief finding a boy in such a huge place as Syracuse? Ah! Maybe Kitty Hanover would see him. It was possible. The boy knew she was there, and maybe he would hunt her up. Mrs. Rawleigh sent a telegram to Kitty at Keith's, asking her to communicate if she saw Hank, to tell the boy to write home, that he would not be molested if he wanted to stay.

The answer came from Hank, by letter, two days later. It read:

"Dear Ma: I come here to see Kitty. It ain't her fault but I'm goofy over her. She remembered me all right but she says I look like hell in my Sunday clothes and how are you and all the folks at the lake and she won't be back next Summer because she's going to Eurup. I come here to see her would she marry me but I didn't get to 'ast-her because she introduced me to her husband, so I guess I'll come back home. I see her take off her act in the theater and she's a dancer and she sings too. If you run my motor boat don't forget to clean the spark plugs. Kitty says to tell you the Adirondacks is a fast place for that kind of a place but after all give her the big towns because she knows more about taxis than what she could ever learn about canoes. I'll be here the rest of the week while she's here because I kind of like to look at her and then she goes off on a long trip from here and she won't be back this way for a year so I guess I'll come home Monday morning in time for school. Don't blame Kitty for this. She didn't do it and she don't even know about it. She thinks I come here to Jus see city life and if you ever meet her don't you tell her no different because what good will it do to have her know what she done to me even if it wasn't her fault?"

"The next time I show a city gal where all the fine pools is and bait her hook for her and guide her to the real trails and carry her bags for her when you ain't looking, she'll know it. If I let my silk line strung on the porch please take it in so it won't rot."

"Your loving son, "HANK"