



Lady Vagabonds

BY CLIFF MAXWELL

The women of the road as seen by the author whose stories of hoboing, "Red" and "Slim," in the two preceding numbers have lent a new flavor to the literature of the world's gypsies.

DURING the twenty-five or more years I have been gypsying over and around the world, I have heard, time after time, from other hoboes, tales of this or that "lady hobo." Ladies who followed the same life and routine that any hobo follows—riding rods, tops, blinds, empties, or the steps of the vestibules.

Many and many are the times I have been regaled by tales of the exploits of these lady hoboes who, according to the numerous narrators of the tales, had no aim or objective in life other than being a hobo.

There was the tale of "Boston Betty." She, according to my raconteurs, found it exceedingly difficult to ride over one certain stretch of road. The poor girl simply could not get aboard the train in any of the various little crannies known to hoboes that a shack (brakeman) didn't come along and tell Betty in coarse, raucous voice to "hit th' grit."

In despair, Betty sauntered up toward the head-end of the train and a short distance up the track ahead of the locomotive. She thought she might be able to swing underneath on the long rods that strengthen passenger and freight cars, which in hobo parlance are known as "gunnels." This is a favorite trick of the old-time tramp royal. Once underneath on the rods, a hobo could feel reasonably sure of at least making the next station without being ditched.

When the train started up, she saw it was too closely guarded by the train-crew for her to ride any of the places usually ridden by the fraternity; then her eye rested upon the wooden crosspiece under the locomotive's pilot, or, as it is more familiarly known, "cow-catcher."

"She beat it down th' track as fast as she could," said my jungle raconteur, "so that by th' time th' pilot was abreast of her th' train would be going too fast for th' shack to bother stopping th' train to put her off.

"As the cow-catcher came even with her, she swung onto it and crawled right down onto that wooden crosspiece that rides about six inches above the rails.

"She made it to th' next station O. K., but th' dam' engine hit a cow before it got there, an' you should have seen Betty when she crawled off!" concluded my story-telling host, with a what-do-you-think-of-that expression on his unshaven mug.

"Tough on the cow," was my usual comment. I can't see why it was a bit more necessary for Betty to forsake the comparative security of the cow-catcher's top and go under it, than it was for that darned locomotive to wait all those years, until Betty climbed underneath its pilot, to sneak up on a cow and strew it all over the landscape and Betty.

That's one exploit you hear. There

are others just as dreary and impossible, like the one of another lady hobo who was hard pressed to board the Black Diamond Express. This lady's moniker slips my memory for the moment, but it seems she, after numerous repulses and blackguardly language from the railroad's hired hands, decided she would make the next station in spite of them, or die in the attempt.

This lady hobo climbed into the water-tank and "made it right through—but she crawled out looking like a drowned rat," says my story-teller, overlooking the fact that his heroine would not only have "looked like a drowned rat" but would have felt exactly the same as a rat *thoroughly* drowned if she really had ridden in that water-tank—even if it had been but half full. The swaying of the tender would have caused the water to wash over its passenger so often and so deeply that she would have been a "drowned rat" before the train had gone five miles.

These, and other tales like them, have been foisted off onto me for a good many hobo moons.

But, despite all these yarns that have grown into tradition and legend on the road, I have yet to meet one of these lady hoboes.

This does not mean, however, that I have never met up with women beating their ways on trains. I have. But they were *not* hoboes. They were girls who wished to visit a certain city and, not having the money to make it possible for them to ride the cushions, did the next best thing.

None of them were on the road for the same reason I was on it: adventure, travel, or incurable wanderlust.

There may be lady hoboes, but I have never known or met or even seen one. But there *are* lady vagabonds—legions!

The difference, as I have been taught to define the two terms, is this: a hobo is an individual who *will* work—despite all you may hear to the contrary—but he will not take steady employment. His wanderlust will not permit of it.

He is an individual who, rather than remain in one place and take steady employment to earn the money that may or may not make it possible for him to travel in comfort, will deliberately become a social and municipal outcast and legitimate prey for the police to beat, pinch, and frame for any crime they are too stupid to solve.

He deliberately chooses a life of hardship, privation, poverty, and ostracism; because, without the money to pay his way, he must beat it, and beating his way on the railroads he becomes in the eyes of the law a minor criminal and is treated as such by municipal authorities and citizens alike. In short, his life as a hobo is everything that a life shouldn't be. This, in itself, is argument enough against any woman ever becoming a chronic hobo.

A vagabond is an individual who takes life even less seriously than a hobo; one who, if he (and *always* she) can possibly avoid it, will never perform manual labor, living by his (or her) wits rather than by work. Some may have certain principles, morals, and scruples, some may not—none of them will work hard. That is a vagabond as I define the term—and these ladies I write of were vagabonds.

Creole Helen supplied no small part to the colorful night life in New Orleans cabarets some years ago. [Her name is fiction, her story is fact.] She was at heart a gypsy, a vagabond.

She was vivacious, alluring. She reeked with that intangible something

which unimaginable and unoriginal people style "it"—and she knew it. She capitalized it.

She could have married into almost any well-to-do family in the Crescent City, had she cared to do so. But she was a gypsy.

Helen tired of the exaggerated gestures which pass current for chivalry in New Orleans. She sickened of the same faces, the same things, and the same nightly garishness of familiar cafés and cabarets.

Now, New Orleans cafés and cabarets nightly house skippers who sail ships over the seven seas. Blue-water skippers are noted for their appreciativeness of feminine pulchritude; therefore, Helen's method of leaving the bright lights of New Orleans was simple. San Francisco was her next port of call.

Frisco's old Barbary Coast could—and did—supply excitement enough for even Helen, and she queened it over sailors, soldiers, civilians, bartenders, and pimps with equal impartiality for some months—then the call of the wanderlust again.

Maybe it was the shrill, piercing scream of a locomotive's whistle that wailed and echoed over the drowsing city, or, more likely, the deep, throaty blast of a steamer's bull-voiced siren bellowing a reluctant farewell to the city of romance. In any event, and in the same manner as before, Helen departed.

Helen, like any true vagabond, remained aboard this second ship until she arrived at a port which struck her fancy—in this instance Calcutta. By the simple expedient of walking down the gangway, without even a good-by to her erstwhile lover, Helen became a resident of this city of the Orient.

In one of the cafés which Helen fre-

quented, there came nightly a Eurasian. Like many half-castes, he had the vices of both races and the virtues of neither—but he appealed strangely to Helen.

It was comparatively easy for him to convince Helen there was money to be made smuggling dope from India into Burmah. Like a great many Occidentals, Helen had always supposed dope was so commonly used in the East that the smuggling of it was unnecessary. Such, however, is not the case. It is a contraband.

Anyway, the half-caste persuaded Helen of the money to be made and the adventures to be had in such an occupation—and it was he who suggested that her hair, which was so long and lustrous, would be just the place to secrete dope going over to Rangoon, and cut and uncut rubies when she returned from Rangoon to Calcutta.

Helen and her partner did well at this for quite a period, and Bombay and Ceylon gem merchants were making as good a thing out of it as were Helen and the half-caste, until he, desiring to double the income, introduced another man and another woman into the firm.

Then came the "eternal triangle," and the new lady partner—to get even—turned informer to a worried customs official, with the result that Helen and the two men were "knocked off."

The two men were each given a two-year "jolt," which they served. Helen, as I understand it, because she was an American citizen, was given a suspended sentence, or its equivalent in the East, and so avoided prison. I have previously mentioned that Helen was distractingly lovely. She also knew men. This may have had something to do with her suspended sentence.

In 1921 I dropped off a tramp steam-

er in Kobe and, in due time, arrived in Shanghai. Almost the first person I met, walking down Jinkee Road, was Helen.

She was older and a light of hardness fitfully glowed in her eyes as she talked. It made me think of a firefly on a summer night in the Mississippi Valley. She was still lovely, but there were little crows'-feet beginning to make their tell-tale tracks about the corners of her eyes, and she did not have that same irresistible verve of youth she once had.

We were glad to see each other. It was when she spoke that I caught the subtle difference between the woman who stood before me in the pitiless blaze of a China sun and the alert, vivacious, don't-care-a-damn girl I knew in the long ago.

There was a note of comfortable tiredness in her voice; a sort of what-I-did-yesterday-I'm-not-doing-to-day tone.

"How's things?" I asked. "Still playing the cafés?"

"Yes," she replied. "But I'm a legitimate entertainer now. I'm married and expect to stay off the gypsy trail for keeps as soon as Bob and I can make a big enough stake for us to open a little joint of our own." Then she continued: "Would you believe it, I expect to have a child before the year has passed?"

After a few moments' further conversation I went on my way to the newspaper offices, where I eventually succeeded in hooking a reportorial job, and she moved on, either to their little apartment out Jessfield Road way, or to Maxim's café, where she and Bob worked nights.

A year later she and Bob had made their stake and had opened their café. They made it through a gun-running deal in which they took no part and which was made possible only because

of the greed of the fellow who supplied, under protest, their stake. [That story, which I have called "Red," I told in the January SCRIBNER'S.]

This, on a thumb-nail, is the story of *one* lady vagabond—but she, emphatically, was *not* a hobo.

There are plenty of other lady vagabonds I could write about, but what's the use? Except for minor variations, they would read about the same.

For instance, I could tell of a certain lady vagabond I once met in Chicago, and later, years later, saw again in a little hovel on Malay Street in Singapore. She had not the stamina—or, maybe, the incentive—Helen had had. This girl gravitated, too. She gravitated far below the point to which Helen descended, eventually to ascend again.

This girl, like Helen, trafficked in drugs—but she became her own best patron. Such a good patron, in fact, that she finally was the only one. When I saw her last she had degenerated into a vacant-eyed, gross, pallid-faced derelict whose mind was even more unsteady than her underpinning, which was very unsteady. What eventually happened to her, I don't know. No doubt she was dumped, by the natives with whom she lived, into some unmarked, shallow grave and forgotten—which, after all, was as she would have had it.

I could tell other stories of lady vagabonds who, instead of doing as these two did—going into the soft climate of the tropics—took the opposite direction and sallied into the wastes of the frozen North—Juneau, Cordova, Ketchikan, Seldovia, Nome, and other Alaskan cities—before they were the cities they are to-day; before modern houses had replaced the barnlike structures of logs where crowds foregathered

nightly to hold high bacchanalian revel.

Some of these feminine vagabonds, like Helen, won back to a more satisfactory mode of existence; others, like the girl I last saw in Singapore, seeped down into the lowest depths of humanity's cesspool, eventually to slip through a little hole in the "strainer" into that

black oblivion which we all will know some day. None of them were hoboes—all of them *were* vagabonds.

Any woman can be a vagabond; few, if any, will willingly become a hobo. Show me a "lady hobo" and I'll show you an angular-bodied, flint-eyed, masculine-minded travesty upon her sex.



Presenting the Coati

BY FRANK M. CHAPMAN

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

The habits and affections of a little-known animal whose acquaintance was made on an island in the Canal Zone by the zoological explorer and curator of ornithology of the American Museum of Natural History.

I PRESENT the coati or coati-mundi, *Nasua narica* of science, "*pisote*," "*gato solo*," "*anda solo*," and doubtless many other names, of the tropical American countries in which he lives. His nearest relative is the raccoon, which he resembles in size, appearance, general habits, and disposition. The coati has a longer tail and a longer nose than the raccoon, and both these members function in ways well designed to express the character of their owner. The tail is usually carried jauntily erect or pointed slightly forward, with a reverse curve near the tip which makes it suggestive of an elongated interrogation-mark, indicative, perhaps, of the coati's inquiring nature. When in doubt as to your next move coati swings his tail sinuously from side to side, with, if one can imagine it, a

kind of quizzical motion matched by the twinkle in his eyes, for coati is not only a most responsive creature but beyond question has a keen sense of humor.

Coati's long, almost prehensile nose houses a highly developed olfactory apparatus which evidently brings him more information than do his eyes. Indeed, I have seen him with closed eyes and curling nose sniffing this side and that in an effort to locate the source of a scent.

With these few words by way of preparation, I invite you to meet coati on Barro Colorado Island, in the Canal Zone, a part of his haunts admirably adapted to the wholly different needs of both man and beast. Here, when the Gatun dam was closed and the rising waters spread through the valleys and