**The Champion of the Weather**

O. Henry

If you should speak of the Kiowa Reservation to the average New Yorker he probably wouldn’t know whether you were referring to a new political dodge at Albany or a leitmotif from “Parsifal.” But out in the Kiowa Reservation advices have been received concerning the existence of New York.

A party of us were on a hunting trip in the Reservation. Bud Kingsbury, our guide, philosopher, and friend, was broiling antelope steaks in camp one night. One of the party, a pinkish-haired young man in a correct hunting costume, sauntered over to the fire to light a cigarette, and remarked carelessly to Bud:

“Nice night!”

“Why, yes,” said Bud, “as nice as any night could be that ain’t received the Broadway stamp of approval.”

Now, the young man was from New York, but the rest of us wondered how Bud guessed it. So, when the steaks were done, we besought him to lay bare his system of ratiocination. And as Bud was something of a Territorial talking machine he made oration as follows:

“How did I know he was from New York? Well, I figured it out as soon as he sprung them two words on me. I was in New York myself a couple of years ago, and I noticed some of the earmarks and hoof tracks of the Rancho Manhattan.”

“Found New York rather different from the Panhandle, didn’t you, Bud?” asked one of the hunters.

“Can’t say that I did,” answered Bud; “anyways, not more than some. The main trail in that town which they call Broadway is plenty travelled, but they’re about the same brand of bipeds that tramp around in Cheyenne and Amarillo, At first I was sort of rattled by the crowds, but I soon says to myself, ‘Here, now, Bud; they’re just plain folks like you and Geronimo and Grover Cleveland and the Watson boys, so don’t get all flustered up with consternation under your saddle blanket,’ and then I feels calm and peaceful, like I was back in the Nation again at a ghost dance or a green corn pow-wow.

“I’d been saving up for a year to give this New York a whirl. I knew a man named Summers that lived there, but I couldn’t find him; so I played a lone hand at enjoying the intoxicating pleasures of the corn-fed metropolis.

“For a while I was so frivolous and locoed by the electric lights and the noises of the phonographs and the second-story railroads that I forgot one of the crying needs of my Western system of natural requirements. I never was no hand to deny myself the pleasures of sociable vocal intercourse with friends and strangers. Out in the Territories when I meet a man I never saw before, inside of nine minutes I know his income, religion, size of collar, and his wife’s temper, and how much he pays for clothes, alimony, and chewing tobacco. It’s a gift with me not to be penurious with my conversation.

“But this here New York was inaugurated on the idea of abstemiousness in regard to the parts of speech. At the end of three weeks nobody in the city had fired even a blank syllable in my direction except the waiter in the grub emporium where I fed. And as his outpourings of syntax wasn’t nothing but plagiarisms from the bill of fare, he never satisfied my yearnings, which was to have somebody hit. If I stood next to a man at a bar he’d edge off and give a Baldwin-Ziegler look as if he suspected me of having the North Pole concealed on my person. I began to wish that I’d gone to Abilene or Waco for my *pa* *se* *ado*; for the mayor of them places will drink with you, and the first citizen you meet will tell you his middle name and ask you to take a chance in a raffle for a music box.

“Well, one day when I was particular hankering for to be gregarious with something more loquacious than a lamp post, a fellow in a caffy says to me, says he:

“‘Nice day!’

“He was a kind of a manager of the place, and I reckon he’d seen me in there a good many times. He had a face like a fish and an eye like Judas, but I got up and put one arm around his neck.

“‘Pardner,’ I says, ’sure it’s a nice day. You’re the first gentleman in all New York to observe that the intricacies of human speech might not be altogether wasted on William Kingsbury. But don’t you think,’ says I, ‘that ‘twas a little cool early in the morning; and ain’t there a feeling of rain in the air to-night? But along about noon it sure was gallupsious weather. How’s all up to the house? You doing right well with the caffy, now?’

“Well, sir, that galoot just turns his back and walks off stiff, without a word, after all my trying to be agreeable! I didn’t know what to make of it. That night I finds a note from Summers, who’d been away from town, giving the address of his camp. I goes up to his house and has a good, old-time talk with his folks. And I tells Summers about the actions of this coyote in the caffy, and desires interpretation.

“‘Oh,’ says Summers, ‘he wasn’t intending to strike up a conversation with you. That’s just the New York style. He’d seen you was a regular customer and he spoke a word or two just to show you he appreciated your custom. You oughtn’t to have followed it up. That’s about as far as we care to go with a stranger. A word or so about the weather may be ventured, but we don’t generally make it the basis of an acquaintance.’

“‘Billy,’ says I, ‘the weather and its ramifications is a solemn subject with me. Meteorology is one of my sore points. No man can open up the question of temperature or humidity or the glad sunshine with me, and then turn tail on it without its leading to a falling barometer. I’m going down to see that man again and give him a lesson in the art of continuous conversation. You say New York etiquette allows him two words and no answer. Well, he’s going to turn himself into a weather bureau and finish what he begun with me, besides indulging in neighbourly remarks on other subjects.’

“Summers talked agin it, but I was irritated some and I went on the street car back to that caffy.

“The same fellow was there yet, walking round in a sort of back corral where there was tables and chairs. A few people was sitting around having drinks and sneering at one another.

“I called that man to one side and herded him into a corner. I unbuttoned enough to show him a thirty-eight I carried stuck under my vest.

“‘Pardner,’ I says, ‘a brief space ago I was in here and you seized the opportunity to say it was a nice day. When I attempted to corroborate your weather signal, you turned your back and walked off. Now,’ says I, ‘you frog-hearted, language-shy, stiff-necked cross between a Spitzbergen sea cook and a muzzled oyster, you resume where you left off in your discourse on the weather.’

“The fellow looks at me and tries to grin, but he sees I don’t and he comes around serious.

“‘Well,’ says he, eyeing the handle of my gun, ‘it was rather a nice day; some warmish, though.’

“‘Particulars, you mealy-mouthed snoozer,’ I says—‘let’s have the specifications—expatiate—fill in the outlines. When you start anything with me in short-hand it’s bound to turn out a storm signal.’

“‘Looked like rain yesterday,’ says the man, ‘but it cleared off fine in the forenoon. I hear the farmers are needing rain right badly up-State.’

“‘That’s the kind of a canter,’ says I. ‘Shake the New York dust off your hoofs and be a real agreeable kind of a centaur. You broke the ice, you know, and we’re getting better acquainted every minute. Seems to me I asked you about your family?’

“‘They’re all well, thanks,’ says he. ‘We—we have a new piano.’

“‘Now you’re coming it,’ I says. ‘This cold reserve is breaking up at last. That little touch about the piano almost makes us brothers. What’s the youngest kid’s name?’ I asks him.

“‘Thomas,’ says he. ‘He’s just getting well from the measles.’

“‘I feel like I’d known you always,’ says I. ‘Now there was just one more—are you doing right well with the caffy, now?’

“‘Pretty well,’ he says. ‘I’m putting away a little money.’

“‘Glad to hear it,’ says I. ‘Now go back to your work and get civilized. Keep your hands off the weather unless you’re ready to follow it up in a personal manner, It’s a subject that naturally belongs to sociability and the forming of new ties, and I hate to see it handed out in small change in a town like this.’

“So the next day I rolls up my blankets and hits the trail away from New York City.”

For many minutes after Bud ceased talking we lingered around the fire, and then all hands began to disperse for bed.

As I was unrolling my bedding I heard the pinkish-haired young man saying to Bud, with something like anxiety in his voice:

“As I say, Mr. Kingsbury, there is something really beautiful about this night. The delightful breeze and the bright stars and the clear air unite in making it wonderfully attractive.”

“Yes,” said Bud, “it’s a nice night.”