**New York by Camp Fire Light**

O. Henry

Away out in the Creek Nation we learned things about New York.

We were on a hunting trip, and were camped one night on the bank of a little stream. Bud Kingsbury was our skilled hunter and guide, and it was from his lips that we had explanations of Manhattan and the queer folks that inhabit it. Bud had once spent a month in the metropolis, and a week or two at other times, and he was pleased to discourse to us of what he had seen.

Fifty yards away from our camp was pitched the teepee of a wandering family of Indians that had come up and settled there for the night. An old, old Indian woman was trying to build a fire under an iron pot hung upon three sticks.

Bud went over to her assistance, and soon had her fire going. When he came back we complimented him playfully upon his gallantry.

“Oh,” said Bud, “don’t mention it. It’s a way I have. Whenever I see a lady trying to cook things in a pot and having trouble I always go to the rescue. I done the same thing once in a high-toned house in. New York City. Heap big society teepee on Fifth Avenue. That Injun lady kind of recalled it to my mind. Yes, I endeavours to be polite and help the ladies out.”

The camp demanded the particulars.

“I was manager of the Triangle B Ranch in the Panhandle,” said Bud. “It was owned at that time by old man Sterling, of New York. He wanted to sell out, and he wrote for me to come on to New York and explain the ranch to the syndicate that wanted to buy. So I sends to Fort Worth and has a forty dollar suit of clothes made, and hits the trail for the big village.

“Well, when I got there, old man Sterling and his outfit certainly laid themselves out to be agreeable. We had business and pleasure so mixed up that you couldn’t tell whether it was a treat or a trade half the time. We had trolley rides, and cigars, and theatre round-ups, and rubber parties.”

“Rubber parties?” said a listener, inquiringly.

“Sure,” said Bud. “Didn’t you never attend ’em? You walk around and try to look at the tops of the skyscrapers. Well, we sold the ranch, and old man Sterling asks me ‘round to his house to take grub on the night before I started back. It wasn’t any high-collared affair—just me and the old man and his wife and daughter. But they was a fine-haired outfit all right, and the lilies of the field wasn’t in it. They made my Fort Worth clothes carpenter look like a dealer in horse blankets and gee strings. And then the table was all pompous with flowers, and there was a whole kit of tools laid out beside everybody’s plate. You’d have thought you was fixed out to burglarize a restaurant before you could get your grub. But I’d been in New York over a week then, and I was getting on to stylish ways. I kind of trailed behind and watched the others use the hardware supplies, and then I tackled the chuck with the same weapons. It ain’t much trouble to travel with the high-flyers after you find out their gait. I got along fine. I was feeling cool and agreeable, and pretty soon I was talking away fluent as you please, all about the ranch and the West, and telling ’em how the Indians eat grasshopper stew and snakes, and you never saw people so interested.

“But the real joy of that feast was that Miss Sterling. Just a little trick she was, not bigger than two bits’ worth of chewing plug; but she had a way about her that seemed to say she was the people, and you believed it. And yet, she never put on any airs, and she smiled at me the same as if I was a millionaire while I was telling about a Creek dog feast and listened like it was news from home.

“By and by, after we had eat oysters and some watery soup and truck that never was in my repertory, a Methodist preacher brings in a kind of camp stove arrangement, all silver, on long legs, with a lamp under it.

“Miss Sterling lights up and begins to do some cooking right on the supper table. I wondered why old man Sterling didn’t hire a cook, with all the money he had. Pretty soon she dished out some cheesy tasting truck that she said was rabbit, but I swear there had never been a Molly cotton tail in a mile of it.

“The last thing on the programme was lemonade. It was brought around in little flat glass bowls and set by your plate. I was pretty thirsty, and I picked up mine and took a big swig of it. Right there was where the little lady had made a mistake. She had put in the lemon all right, but she’d forgot the sugar. The best housekeepers slip up sometimes. I thought maybe Miss Sterling was just learning to keep house and cook—that rabbit would surely make you think so—and I says to myself, ‘Little lady, sugar or no sugar I’ll stand by you,’ and I raises up my bowl again and drinks the last drop of the lemonade. And then all the balance of ’em picks up their bowls and does the same. And then I gives Miss Sterling the laugh proper, just to carry it off like a joke, so she wouldn’t feel bad about the mistake.

“After we all went into the sitting room she sat down and talked to me quite awhile.

“‘It was so kind of you, Mr. Kingsbury,’ says she, ‘to bring my blunder off so nicely. It was so stupid of me to forget the sugar.’

“‘Never you mind,’ says I, ’some lucky man will throw his rope over a mighty elegant little housekeeper some day, not far from here.’

“‘If you mean me, Mr. Kingsbury,’ says she, laughing out loud, ‘I hope he will be as lenient with my poor housekeeping as you have been.’

“’don’t mention it,’ says I. ‘Anything to oblige the ladies.’”

Bud ceased his reminiscences. And then some one asked him what he considered the most striking and prominent trait of New Yorkers.

“The most visible and peculiar trait of New York folks,” answered Bud, “is New York. Most of ’em has New York on the brain. They have heard of other places, such as Waco, and Paris, and Hot Springs, and London; but they don’t believe in ’em. They think that town is all Merino. Now to show you how much they care for their village I’ll tell you about one of ’em that strayed out as far as the Triangle B while I was working there.

“This New Yorker come out there looking for a job on the ranch. He said he was a good horseback rider, and there was pieces of tanbark hanging on his clothes yet from his riding school.

“Well, for a while they put him to keeping books in the ranch store, for he was a devil at figures. But he got tired of that, and asked for something more in the line of activity. The boys on the ranch liked him all right, but he made us tired shouting New York all the time. Every night he’d tell us about East River and J. P. Morgan and the Eden Musee and Hetty Green and Central Park till we used to throw tin plates and branding irons at him.

“One day this chap gets on a pitching pony, and the pony kind of sidled up his back and went to eating grass while the New Yorker was coming down.

“He come down on his head on a chunk of mesquit wood, and he didn’t show any designs toward getting up again. We laid him out in a tent, and he begun to look pretty dead. So Gideon Pease saddles up and burns the wind for old Doc Sleeper’s residence in Dogtown, thirty miles away.

“The doctor comes over and he investigates the patient.

“‘Boys,’ says he, ‘you might as well go to playing seven-up for his saddle and clothes, for his head’s fractured and if he lives ten minutes it will be a remarkable case of longevity.’

“Of course we didn’t gamble for the poor rooster’s saddle—that was one of Doc’s jokes. But we stood around feeling solemn, and all of us forgive him for having talked us to death about New York.

“I never saw anybody about to hand in his checks act more peaceful than this fellow. His eyes were fixed ‘way up in the air, and he was using rambling words to himself all about sweet music and beautiful streets and white-robed forms, and he was smiling like dying was a pleasure.

“‘He’s about gone now,’ said Doc. ‘Whenever they begin to think they see heaven it’s all off.’

“Blamed if that New York man didn’t sit right up when he heard the Doc say that.

“‘Say,’ says he, kind of disappointed, ‘was that heaven? Confound it all, I thought it was Broadway. Some of you fellows get my clothes. I’m going to get up.’

“And I’ll be blamed,” concluded Bud, “if he wasn’t on the train with a ticket for New York in his pocket four days afterward!”