

WHEN "LOST IN NEW YORK" WAS TOO WELL ACTED

If you want to know how it feels to be lost in New York, just ask me," said the sunken-eyed man. "I know. I've been lost myself. It happened the very first day I struck this town. That was many years ago, when I reached New York without a five-cent piece to my name. The first person I spoke to about work stood just outside the ferryhouse where I had come in. He had a placard on his back informing the hungry public where to go for the best coffee in town. This man had a genial, happy-go-lucky face, which inspired me with confidence and made me feel safer in addressing him than any of the more prosperous-looking people that had come over on the ferryboat with me. He stopped promenading while I talked, and listened attentively.

"'Strapped, are you,' he said, when I had finished, 'and want something to do?'

"I said I did.

"'Well,' said he, 'you can tell by just looking at me that I ain't no employment agency, but if you're willing to take anything that comes along, maybe I can get you a job carrying a banner.'

"I was so green in those days that I didn't know what carrying a banner meant. However, my friend explained, and at noon I accompanied him to headquarters. I had no trouble in getting a job. The managers rigged me out in togs more truly rural than those I already wore and sent me out to advertise a brand of cigars by pretending to be lost in New York.

"My territory extended from Fourteenth Street north in Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Stranger though I was, I found my way up there all right. It was when I got tired and wanted to head toward the office that my troubles began. I didn't know which way to go, and for the life of me I couldn't get anybody to tell me. All the afternoon I had been stopping people as a part of the game and asking to be directed to a certain

spot, and when it came to the point of wanting information in dead earnest everybody thought I was still guying and refused to be taken in. The more impassioned I made the appeal the more confident people became that I was acting a part, and many of them stopped to compliment me on the artistic rendition of my new rôle. Even a policeman was struck by it.

"'You're a good one, all right,' he said. 'If I didn't know better I would take you for a sure enough jay and help you out.'

"'I'm lost, I'm lost,' I wailed in a loud voice. 'Good heavens, can't anybody see that I'm lost?'

"The cabman who had just driven up to the curb heard me and laughed, but the woman who had got out of the cab did not laugh. She stepped up to the doorway and looked at me pityingly.

"'Oh, the poor fellow,' she said, 'I do believe he really is lost.'

"Her escort drew her back.

"'Nonsense,' he said, 'don't bother with him. He's only fooling. That's just a part of his game. Can't you see that he is dressed up to represent a Rube?'

"I stood up and faced the couple with something like a death rattle in my throat.

"'That's all right,' I said; 'I do look like a Rube, but I feel a darned sight more like one than I look. I'm a jay in fact as well as in name. I'm lost, I tell you. I know where I want to go, but I don't know how to get there. If you'll be kind enough to show me—'

"And then I broke down again. The woman, bless her sweet soul, beamed with sympathy.

"'Oh, Jim,' she said, 'he is telling the truth. Can't you see he is? He is, lost. I am going to send him to—wherever it is he wants to go.'

"And she did it, too, in that very cab, at her own expense."