## Vanity and Some Sables

O. Henry

When “Kid” Brady was sent to the ropes by Molly McKeever’s blue-black eyes he withdrew from the Stovepipe Gang. So much for the power of a colleen’s blanderin’ tongue and stubborn true-heartedness. If you are a man who read this, may such an influence be sent you before 2 o’clock to-morrow; if you are a woman, may your Pomeranian greet you this morning with a cold nose—a sign of doghealth and your happiness.

The Stovepipe Gang borrowed its name from a sub-district of the city called the “Stovepipe,” which is a narrow and natural extension of the familiar district known as “Hell’s Kitchen.” The “Stovepipe” strip of town runs along Eleventh and Twelfth avenues on the river, and bends a hard and sooty elbow around little, lost homeless DeWitt Clinton park. Consider that a stovepipe is an important factor in any kitchen and the situation is analyzed. The chefs in “Hell’s Kitchen” are many, and the “Stovepipe” gang, wears the cordon blue.

The members of this unchartered but widely known brotherhood appeared to pass their time on street corners arrayed like the lilies of the conservatory and busy with nail files and penknives. Thus displayed as a guarantee of good faith, they carried on an innocuous conversation in a 200-word vocabulary, to the casual observer as innocent and immaterial as that heard in clubs seven blocks to the east.

But off exhibition the “Stovepipes” were not mere street corner ornaments addicted to posing and manicuring. Their serious occupation was the separating of citizens from their coin and valuables. Preferably this was done by weird and singular tricks without noise or bloodshed; but whenever the citizen honored by their attentions refused to impoverish himself gracefully his objections came to be spread finally upon some police station blotter or hospital register.

The police held the “Stovepipe” gang in perpetual suspicion and respect. As the nightingale’s liquid note is heard in the deepest shadows, so along the “Stovepipe’s” dark and narrow confines the whistle for reserves punctures the dull ear of night. Whenever there was smoke in the “stovepipe” the tasselled men in blue knew there was fire in “Hell’s Kitchen.”

“Kid” Brady promised Molly to be good. “Kid” was the vainest, the strongest, the wariest and the most successful plotter in the gang. Therefore, the boys were sorry to give him up.

But they witnessed his fall to a virtuous life without protest. For, in the Kitchen it is considered neither unmanly nor improper for a guy to do as his girl advises.

Black her eye for love’s sake, if you will; but it is all-to-the-good business to do a thing when she wants you to do it.

“Turn off the hydrant,” said the Kid, one night when Molly, tearful, besought him to amend his ways. “I’m going to cut out the gang. You for mine, and the simple life on the side. I’ll tell you, Moll—I’ll get work; and in a year we’ll get married. I’ll do it for you. We’ll get a flat and a flute, and a sewing machine and a rubber plant and live as honest as we can.”

“Oh, Kid,” sighed Molly, wiping the powder off his shoulder with her handkerchief, “I’d rather hear you say that than to own all of New York. And we can be happy on so little!”

The Kid looked down at his speckless cuffs and shining patent leathers with a suspicion of melancholy.

“It’ll hurt hardest in the rags department,” said he. “I’ve kind of always liked to rig out swell when I could. You know how I hate cheap things, Moll. This suit set me back sixty-five. Anything in the wearing apparel line has got to be just so, or it’s to the misfit parlors for it, for mine. If I work I won’t have so much coin to hand over to the little man with the big shears.”

“Never mind, Kid. I’ll like you just as much in a blue jumper as I would in a red automobile.”

Before the Kid had grown large enough to knock out his father he had been compelled to learn the plumber’s art. So now back to this honorable and useful profession he returned. But it was as an assistant that he engaged himself; and it is the master plumber and not the assistant, who wears diamonds as large as hailstones and looks contemptuously upon the marble colonnades of Senator Clark’s mansion.

Eight months went by as smoothly and surely as though they had “elapsed” on a theater program. The Kid worked away at his pipes and solder with no symptoms of backsliding. The Stovepipe gang continued its piracy on the high avenues, cracked policemen’s heads, held up late travelers, invented new methods of peaceful plundering, copied Fifth avenue’s cut of clothes and neckwear fancies and comported itself according to its lawless bylaws. But the Kid stood firm and faithful to his Molly, even though the polish was gone from his fingernails and it took him 15 minutes to tie his purple silk ascot so that the worn places would not show.

One evening he brought a mysterious bundle with him to Molly’s house.

“Open that, Moll!” he said in his large, quiet way. “It’s for you.”

Molly’s eager fingers tore off the wrappings. She shrieked aloud, and in rushed a sprinkling of little McKeevers, and Ma McKeever, dishwashy, but an undeniable relative of the late Mrs. Eve.

Again Molly shrieked, and something dark and long and sinuous flew and enveloped her neck like an anaconda.

“Russian sables,” said the Kid, pridefully, enjoying the sight of Molly’s round cheek against the clinging fur. “The real thing. They don’t grow anything in Russia too good for you, Moll.”

Molly plunged her hands into the muff, overturned a row of the family infants and flew to the mirror. Hint for the beauty column. To make bright eyes, rosy cheeks and a bewitching smile: Recipe—one set Russian sables. Apply.

When they were alone Molly became aware of a small cake of the ice of common sense floating down the full tide of her happiness.

“You’re a bird, all right, Kid,” she admitted gratefully. “I never had any furs on before in my life. But ain’t Russian sables awful expensive? Seems to me I’ve heard they were.”

“Have I ever chucked any bargain-sale stuff at you, Moll?” asked the Kid, with calm dignity. “Did you ever notice me leaning on the remnant counter or peering in the window of the five-and-ten? Call that scarf $250 and the muff $175 and you won’t make any mistake about the price of Russian sables. The swell goods for me. Say, they look fine on you, Moll.”

Molly hugged the sables to her bosom in rapture. And then her smile went away little by little, and she looked the Kid straight in the eye sadly and steadily.

He knew what every look of hers meant; and he laughed with a faint flush upon his face.

“Cut it out,” he said, with affectionate roughness. “I told you I was done with that. I bought ’em and paid for ’em, all right, with my own money.”

“Out of the money you worked for, Kid? Out of $75 a month?”

“Sure. I been saving up.”

“Let’s see—saved $425 in eight months, Kid?”

“Ah, let up,” said the Kid, with some heat. “I had some money when I went to work. Do you think I’ve been holding ’em up again? I told you I’d quit. They’re paid for on the square. Put ’em on and come out for a walk.”

Molly calmed her doubts. Sables are soothing. Proud as a queen she went forth in the streets at the Kid’s side. In all that region of low-lying streets Russian sables had never been seen before. The word sped, and doors and windows blossomed with heads eager to see the swell furs Kid Brady had given his girl. All down the street there were “Oh’s” and “Ah’s” and the reported fabulous sum paid for the sables was passed from lip to lip, increasing as it went. At her right elbow sauntered the Kid with the air of princes. Work had not diminished his love of pomp and show and his passion for the costly and genuine. On a corner they saw a group of the Stovepipe Gang loafing, immaculate. They raised their hats to the Kid’s girl and went on with their calm, unaccented palaver.

Three blocks behind the admired couple strolled Detective Ransom, of the Central office. Ransom was the only detective on the force who could walk abroad with safety in the Stovepipe district. He was fair dealing and unafraid and went there with the hypothesis that the inhabitants were human. Many liked him, and now and then one would tip off to him something that he was looking for.

“What’s the excitement down the street?” asked Ransom of a pale youth in a red sweater.

“Dey’re out rubberin’ at a set of buffalo robes Kid Brady staked his girl to,” answered the youth. “Some say he paid $900 for de skins. Dey’re swell all right enough.”

“I hear Brady has been working at his old trade for nearly a year,” said the detective. “He doesn’t travel with the gang any more, does he?”

“He’s workin’, all right,” said the red sweater, “but—say, sport, are you trailin’ anything in the fur line? A job in a plumbin’ shop don’ match wid dem skins de Kid’s girl’s got on.”

Ransom overtook the strolling couple on an empty street near the river bank. He touched the Kid’s arm from behind.

“Let me see you a moment, Brady,” he said, quietly. His eye rested for a second on the long fur scarf thrown stylishly back over Molly’s left shoulder. The Kid, with his old-time police hating frown on his face, stepped a yard or two aside with the detective.

“Did you go to Mrs. Hethcote’s on West 7—th street yesterday to fix a leaky water pipe?” asked Ransom.

“I did,” said the Kid. “What of it?”

“The lady’s $1,000 set of Russian sables went out of the house about the same time you did. The description fits the ones this lady has on.”

“To h—Harlem with you,” cried the Kid, angrily. “You know I’ve cut out that sort of thing, Ransom. I bought them sables yesterday at—”

The Kid stopped short.

“I know you’ve been working straight lately,” said Ransom. “I’ll give you every chance. I’ll go with you where you say you bought the furs and investigate. The lady can wear ’em along with us and nobody’ll be on. That’s fair, Brady.”

“Come on,” agreed the Kid, hotly. And then he stopped suddenly in his tracks and looked with an odd smile at Molly’s distressed and anxious face.

“No use,” he said, grimly. “They’re the Hethcote sables, all right. You’ll have to turn ’em over, Moll, but they ain’t too good for you if they cost a million.”

Molly, with anguish in her face, hung upon the Kid’s arm.

“Oh, Kiddy, you’ve broke my heart,” she said. “I was so proud of you—and now they’ll do you—and where’s our happiness gone?”

“Go home,” said the Kid, wildly. “Come on, Ransom—take the furs. Let’s get away from here. Wait a minute—I’ve a good mind to—no, I’ll be d–––– if I can do it—run along, Moll—I’m ready, Ransom.”

Around the corner of a lumber-yard came Policeman Kohen on his way to his beat along the river. The detective signed to him for assistance. Kohen joined the group. Ransom explained.

“Sure,” said Kohen. “I hear about those saples dat vas stole. You say you have dem here?”

Policeman Kohen took the end of Molly’s late scarf in his hands and looked at it closely.

“Once,” he said, “I sold furs in Sixth avenue. Yes, dese are saples. Dey come from Alaska. Dis scarf is vort $12 and dis muff—”

“Biff!” came the palm of the Kid’s powerful hand upon the policeman’s mouth. Kohen staggered and rallied. Molly screamed. The detective threw himself upon Brady and with Kohen’s aid got the nippers on his wrist.

“The scarf is vort $12 and the muff is vort $9,” persisted the policeman. “Vot is dis talk about $1,000 saples?”

The Kid sat upon a pile of lumber and his face turned dark red.

“Correct, Solomonski!” he declared, viciously. “I paid $21.50 for the set. I’d rather have got six months and not have told it. Me, the swell guy that wouldn’t look at anything cheap! I’m a plain bluffer. Moll—my salary couldn’t spell sables in Russian.”

Molly cast herself upon his neck.

“What do I care for all the sables and money in the world,” she cried. “It’s my Kiddy I want. Oh, you dear, stuck-up, crazy blockhead!”

“You can take dose nippers off,” said Kohen to the detective. “Before I leaf de station de report come in dat de lady vind her saples—hanging in her wardrobe. Young man, I excuse you dat punch in my vace—dis von time.”

Ransom handed Molly her furs. Her eyes were smiling upon the Kid. She wound the scarf and threw the end over her left shoulder with a duchess’ grace.

“A gouple of young vools,” said Policeman Kohen to Ransom; “come on away.”