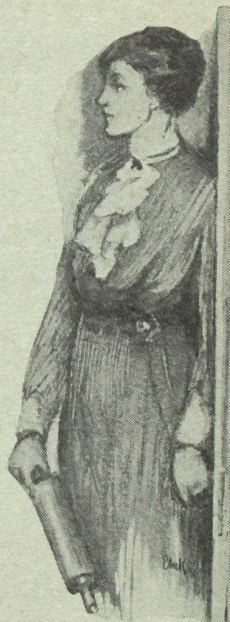
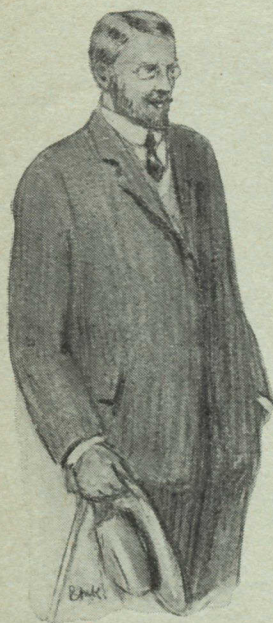


MISS VIRGINIA'S KIDD

How the "Kid" Was Exchanged

By EDITH G. BAYNE



MISS Virginia Grantley stared into the open suit case before her. It may have been partly the meretricious character of the contents which had caused her jaw to sag and a cry of almost horrified surprise to escape her. At any rate, instead of beholding her legitimate purchases of the afternoon, her bewildered gaze rested upon the following items:

One pair of men's tan shoes, one black-and-white-checked cap, some soiled collars, a pair of cheap military brushes, a packet of playing cards, two empty "pop" bottles, a pink striped shirt, a paper-covered book with a questionable looking title, and several neckties of outspoken patterns.

A nice assortment of articles for a spinster lady of respectable habits and rather cultured tastes to be carrying about!

These things were all that were visible to the naked eye. Goodness only knew what lay beneath! Miss Virginia didn't know and didn't care. She snapped the offending suit case together and sank into the nearest chair.

Rapidly she reviewed the events of her return journey from the city. It was Saturday, and of course the streets and shops had been crowded, but she couldn't remember a moment when she had allowed her own suit case out of her sight. At just what point had the unfortunate exchange occurred? Her own property might easily have been the twin of this; it was just such another ordinary brown leather affair with no distinguishing marks of any kind.

Yet, looking more closely on the changeling she now detected a couple of foreign labels at one end. Miss Virginia took up her "house specks," adjusted them carefully, and proceeded to make deductions from the limited amount of circumstantial evidence at hand. But there was little to aid her, and when she had walked gingerly about the suit case three or four times, she returned to the home base, confessing herself completely baffled.

"I do believe I've lost my grip in more ways than one," she said aloud. "To think that I, at my age, and with all my experience in travelling—tut, tut, it's just too ridiculous!"

Then an idea struck her and a gleam of triumph lit her keen blue eyes.

"That man on the train coming home!" she exclaimed, jubilantly. "When I put my head out of the window at Leaside to talk to Cousin Anne Brownlow, the seat ahead became empty, and he took it. I remember being glad, because he smelt horribly of stale tobacco. My, I wish they'd run a Pullman on our line!"

She looked askance at the grip.

"Yes, he was just the sort of man who would wear clothes like that and—play cards and read French plays and—all the rest of it!"

She remembered that he had been sandy-complexioned, was short of stature, had the end of one finger on his left hand missing, and wore a soft grey hat. Those four points would help.

And after a moment she had another clue.

With true feminine curiosity, she had taken a fresh peep into the grip, and there on the leather lining near the lock she found the owner's name and address in neat black letters that were so very small she could scarcely make them out. What Miss Virginia read was: "O. U. Kidd, Toronto."

Now Miss Virginia had always led such a lonely and blue-stocking sort of an existence that slang was a closed book to her. Then, too, she was worried over her loss. In nervous haste she hurried to the village depot and despatched to the three leading city dailies the following telegram for the Lost and Found columns:

"O. U. Kidd, Toronto, is urgently requested to communicate with Miss V. Grantley, Cloverdale."

FROM early spring until well along in the autumn Miss Virginia spent a great deal of her time out-of-doors tending her vegetables and flowers and vines.

She was in her garden one warm afternoon in the ensuing week picking lilacs to send to a sick friend, when she heard her gate click. She peered over a young locust hedge and saw, coming up her neat gravel path, an elderly man who looked like a retired farmer of some means.

"Hey!" he called out as he spied her blue sunbonnet. "Is this whar Miss V. Grantley lives?"

Miss Virginia assured him that such was the case and came around to the front of her grounds, a big sheaf of lilac blooms in one hand and her garden shears in the other.

"Your name is Kidd, of course?" she queried, rather doubtfully. "And you've come for your suit case?"

Perhaps it was the sandy-complexioned man's father come to retrieve the grip, she thought.

"Oh, sure," was the reply. "But let's go up an' set on the verandy a spell."

Poor old chap! No doubt he was tired, having come some distance! Miss Grantley made him comfortable in a deep willow chair and they chatted for a few moments on the weather, the crops, and kindred topics. The old man fanned himself with his hat.

"I'm retired," he told Miss Grantley, as he sized her up out of a pair of bold dark eyes that seemed to be the only feature of his face that had remained youthful. "Yep! My sons run the old place now an' I'm livin' by myself on a new farm. Got a hired man to do the work, an' I can take a purty good time now—only (he coughed), only of course I'm so durn lonesome. I got an ottymobilly. Do you like ridin' in them?"

"Not very," said Miss Virginia. "Of course, if I know the man at the wheel—"

"Say! You do look purty with them posies on your lap! I'm kinda glad you're not a gal. I thought as how mebbe you might be young an' giddy—"

MISS VIRGINIA rose suddenly. Two red spots burned in her cheeks.

"I'll go and get your suit case, Mr. Kidd," she said stiffly, and moved off.

"Say, now! Don't git huffy. I don't mean no harm."

"Where is my suit case? Did you leave it at the station?" she demanded suddenly, turning about.



"That man!" exclaimed Miss Virginia. "He was just the kind of man who would wear clothes like that and—play cards and read French plays and—all the rest of it!"

"Say, looky here, miss—ma'am—"

"Answer me, please!"

"Wall, I declare to goodness!" and the visitor rose uneasily as Miss Virginia stamped her foot. "I don't know nothin' 'bout a suit case. I only answered your ad. 'Oh, You Kid,' is what it said—"

Miss Virginia stared, still uncomprehending.

"I've answered forty-three ads sence poor Maria died," the old man continued. "But yours sounded very promisin', I must say you suit me fine, too. The others was mostly widders or silly gals—"

"I—I—I'll call my dog!" breathed Miss Virginia.

"Eh?"

"Here, Ponto, Ponto, Pon—"

But seizing his hat, the old gallant took the steps in two bounds and scuttled away, the lady watching him with a tense, inscrutable expression.

It is to be feared that Miss Virginia was not quite as angry as she should have been, for, as her strange visitor's back receded in the distance between the rows of budding maples, she smiled.

He had called her pretty! She went into her cool sitting room and made an excuse to herself to pass the mirror over the umbrella rack. After that, as she moved about her various duties, she neglected no mirrors whatsoever.

"Well, I'm not a fright, anyway," she murmured with considerable satisfaction, at last. "My hair has only a little grey in it, and it's thick and well cared for, and I've got a good colour. My figure, too—why only last week Lige Peter's boy, the new one in the store, seeing me at a distance, as he came up the walk, thought I was a young girl! Not that it matters, of course!"

At this point she sighed. Of lovers she had had none, absolutely n-o-n-e. Once, away back in the impressionable early twenties, she had seen a young man whom she perhaps could have—oh! Well, you never can tell! Maybe he drank or something. She sighed again, and that young man being still in her mind, she proceeded to recall the episode in which they had mutually figured. She had gone out on the river in a leaky punt one day, and about forty rods from shore the inevitable had happened. As she had been about to go down for the third time, some one with a bulldog grip had seized her and towed her to safety.

How handsome he had looked with his red hair all wet, as he had scolded her gently for having been so fool-hardy! He must have been a true hero, the kind who deprecates publicity, for he had gone away without telling her his name.

A ring at Miss Virginia's door-bell! "Goodness! Who's that, I wonder?" she exclaimed to her dog, who lay at her feet. "At this time of night!" She hastened to answer it, and there stood a young man carrying a suit case—but alas, not her suit case, for this was yellow.

"I'm a travelling salesman," he announced at once, with an ingratiating smile on smooth-shaven face, and eyes that had a roving commission.

"I don't want anything to-day," returned Miss Grantley in decided tones.

THE light from her hall lamp revealed him to her but left her in part shadow that rendered her face and form indistinct.

"Aren't you going to invite me in? I've just got off my train, and I knew you'd welcome me, so I didn't go to a hotel. Are Mamma and Papa in, or have you sent 'em away for the evening?"

"Sir!" She thought she hadn't heard aright!

"What's that?" he asked, in surprise.

"Leave my house this instant!"

The young man's mouth fell open.

"Well, I like that!" he observed, ruefully. "Gee! Your name is Miss V. Grantley, isn't it?"

"It is. But—"

"Then, what's the matter? What is so urgent that you want to see me about? I'm the 'Oh, You Kid' boy, you know. That's what every one between Toronto and Halifax calls me. Here I am! Shoot!"

The last word must have given Miss Virginia an inspiration, for she turned quickly to the wall and pulled down an old muzzle-loader that her father had used in the Fenian Raid.

"Yes, I'll shoot!" she flung back. "I'm the best woman shot in the country. So, one, two, three—" At the one she had made a feint of cocking, at the "two" she had brought the

gun to her shoulder, at the "three"—all that could be seen of the travelling salesman was a pair of heels rapidly diminuendoing away down the moonlit path.

"This is getting on my nerves," said Miss Virginia, as she double-locked all the doors. "I'm going to pack up in the morning and go for a visit to Cousin Anne Brownlow. This will teach me to be more careful in word-ing telegrams. It wouldn't have hurt me to use a few more words, anyway, for I can make Mr. Kidd (if there is such a person) pay for the expense I've been put to. Oh, dear! I—wish there was a man in the house to-night."

The next morning, very early, Miss Virginia set about packing her old black club-bag, preparatory to a visit to her cousin. She had finished by eight o'clock and was on the point of taking her dog to a neighbour's (who usually boarded him whenever his owner was away for very long) when she heard her gate click. Peeping under one of the front window blinds, she (Continued on page 32).