

THE VAGRANT DUKE

By GEORGE GIBBS

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THIS BEGINS THE STORY
 Peter Nikolaevitch, Russian Grand Duke, driven from home by revolution, finds in America a job as forger on the estate of Jonathan K. McGuire and is there placed in charge of a body of men whose principal duty appears to be to see to it that no stranger approaches the house by night or day. McGuire is desperately afraid of somebody or something. Peter knows not what or whom. He feels the guard lax, experiments with it, fools it and shames it.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

CHAPTER V
New Elements

COME of the men on guard in the middle watch reported that they had heard what seemed to be the sounds of music very far away in the woods and were disturbed at the trick their ears had played upon them. But Peter didn't tell them the truth. If listening for the notes of a piano would keep them awake, listen they should. He slept until noon and then went to the house for orders.

Morning seemed to make a difference in the point of view. If the moon had made the night lovely, the sun brought with it the promise of every good thing. The walk through the woods to Black Rock House was a joy, very slightly alleviated by the poor condition of the trees under which Peter passed. It was primeval forest even here, with valuable trees stunted and poor ones vastly overgrown according to nature's law, which provides for the survival of the fittest. This was the law, too, which was to be applied to Peter. Would he grow straight and true in this foreign soil or gnarled and misshapen like the cedars and the maples that he saw? Yes, he would grow and straighten.

Optimism seemed to be the order of the new day. At the house he found that his employer had put on a clean shirt and was freshly shaved. The windows of the room were opened wide to the sunlight which streamed into the gloom, revealing its darkest corners. McGuire himself seemed to have responded to the influence of the sun and the balmy air which swept across his table. His manner was now calm, his voice more measured.

When Peter came into the room Mr. McGuire closed the heavy doors of the steel safe carefully and turned to greet him. "Oh, glad to see you, Nichols," he said more cheerfully. "A quiet night, I understand."

"Yes," laughed Nichols, "except for the man who got through the guards and smoked a cigarette on your porch."

"What?" gasped McGuire.

"Don't be alarmed, sir. It was only the defect of his police system."

"Oh! Ah! In, in, yes, of course. Very good. And you weren't shot at?"

"Oh, no, sir—though I'd given them leave to put me in any way they saw fit, I think you're adequately protected now."

"Good," said McGuire. "Have a cigar. I'm glad you've come. I wanted to talk to you."

"And when they had lighted their cigars," McGuire said, "it's about this very guard. I'm afraid you'll have to keep your men under cover at least in the daytime."

"Under cover?"

"Well, you see," went on McGuire in some hesitation, "my daughter (the girl I just mentioned) is coming down from New York today. I don't want her, but she's coming. I can't stop her. She doesn't know anything about this—this guarding the house. And I don't want her to know. She mustn't know. She'd ask questions. I don't want questions asked. I'll get her away as soon as I can, but she mustn't be put into my hands."

"I see," said Peter, examining the ash of his cigar. "You don't want her to know anything about the impending attempts upon your life and property."

"Yes, that's what I want. And I'll explain this to the new men. As for yourself—of course you're my new superintendent and forester."

McGuire got up and paced the floor, slowly looking at Peter out of the tail of his eye.

"I like you, Nichols. We'll get along. You've got courage and intelligence—and, of course, anybody can see you're a gentleman. You'll keep on taking your meals in the house—"

"If you'd like me to go elsewhere—"

"No. I see no reason why Peggy shouldn't like you. She's a home body. But she's very headstrong, has been since a kid. I suppose I humor her a bit—who wouldn't? I lost my oldest girl and her boy with the flu. Her husband's still in France. And Peggy's got a will of her own. Peg has," he finished in a kind of admiring abstraction, "got a society bee in her bonnet. Wants to go with all the swells. I'm backin' her, Nichols. She'll do it, too, before she's through."

"I haven't a dot of it," said Peter soberly, though very much amused at his employer's ingenueness. Here, then, was the weak spot in the armor of this relations millionaire—his daughter. The older one and her child were dead. That accounted for the toys in the cabin. Peggy sounded interesting—if nothing else, for her vitality. "I'd better see about this at once, then. If she should come—"

Peter rose and was about to leave the room when there was a sound of an automobile horn and the sudden roar of an exhaust outside. He followed McGuire to the window and saw a low red runabout containing a girl and a male companion emerging from the trees. A man in the road was holding up his hands in signal for the machine to stop and had barely time to leap aside to avoid being run down. The car roared up to the porch, the breathless man, who was Shad Wells, pursuing. Peter was glad that he had had the good sense not to shoot. He turned to his employer, prepared for either anger or dismay, and found that McGuire was merely grinning and chuckling softly to himself.

"Just like her!" he muttered, "some kid, that!"

Meanwhile Shad Wells, making a bad race of it, was only halfway up the

drive, when at a signal and shout from McGuire, he stopped running, stared, spat and returned to his post.

There was a commotion downstairs, the shooting of bolts, the sounds of violence and presently the quick patter of feminine feet. McGuire, now completely oblivious of Peter, went to meet.

"Well, daughter!"

"Hello, pop!"

Peter caught a glimpse of a face and straggling brown hair, quickly engulfed in McGuire's arms.

"What on earth—" began McGuire.

"Thought we'd give you a little touch of high life, pop. It was so hot in town. And the hotel's full of a conventional roughnecks. I brought Freddy with me and Mildred and Jack are in the other car. We thought the rest might do us good."

The voice was nasal and pitched high, as though she were trying to make herself audible in a crowd. Peter was ready to revise his estimate that her face was pretty, for to him no woman was more beautiful than her own voice.

"But you can't get here now," went on McGuire, "not more than over night—with all these people. I'm very busy."

"Well, see about that. I never saw the woods look prettier. We came by Lakewood and Brown's Mills and—why, who—?"

As she sidled into the room she suddenly emptied Peter, who was still standing by the window.

"Who—? Why—Oh, yes, this is my new superintendent and forester. Meet my daughter—Mr. Nichols."

Peter bowed and expressed pleasure. Miss McGuire swept him with a quick glance that took in his flannel shirt, corduroy breeches and rough boots, nodded politely and turned away.

Peter smiled. Like Beth Cameron this girl was very particular in choosing her acquaintances.

"I nearly killed a guy in the driveway," she went on, "who was he, pop?"

"Er—of the gardeners. I've told them to keep people off the place."

"Well, I'd like to see him keep me off! I suppose he'll be trying to hold up Mildred and Jack—"

She walked to the window, passing close beside Peter, paying a little attention to his presence as if he had been an article of furniture.

"Can't you get this man to go down, she said, indicating Peter, "and tell them it's all right?"

"Of course," said Peter politely. "I'll go at once. And I'd like to arrange to look over part of the estate with Wells, Mr. McGuire," he added.

"All right, Nichols," said the old man with a frown. And then significantly—"but remember what I've told you. Make careful arrangements before you go."

"Yes, sir."

Peter went down the stairs, amused at his dismissal. On the veranda he found a young man sitting on some cushions smoking a cigarette. This was Freddy, of course. He afterwards learned that his last name was Mordant, that he was a part of Peggy's ambitions, and that he had been involved here from a camp and discharged from the military service. As Freddy turned, Peter bowed politely and passed on. Having catalogued him to his ostentatious, Freddy like Peggy had turned away, smoking his cigarette.

Peter thought that some Americans were born with bad manners, and others had had manners thrust upon them. Impoliteness was nothing new to him, since he had been in America. It was indigestible. Personally, he didn't mind that sort of people he met, but he seemed to be aware that a new element had come to Black Rock which was to make disquietude for Jonathan K. McGuire and difficulty for himself. And yet, too, there was a modicum of safety, perhaps, in the presence of these new arrivals, for it had been clear from his employer's demeanor that the terrors of the night had passed with the coming of the day.

He commented on this to Shad Wells, who informed him that night was always the old man's bad time.

"Seems sort of like he's sneered 'o' the dark," Tain't natural. "Fraid o' ghosts, they say," he laughed.

"Well," said Peter, "we've got our orders. And the thing he fears isn't a ghost. It's human."

"Sure?"

"Yes. And since he's more afraid after dark he has probably had his warnings. But we're not to take any chances."

Having given his new orders to Jesse, who was to be in charge during his absence, they struck into the woods upon the first side of the creek for the appraisal of a part of the strip known as the "Upper Reserve." From an attitude of suspicion and sneering contempt, Peter's opinion had changed to one of indifference. The unflinching good humor of the now superintendent had done something to prepare the ground for an enduring relation between them. Like Beth Cameron Shad had sneered at the word "forester." He was the average lumberman, only interested in the cutting down of trees for the market—the commercial aspect of the business—heedless of the future, indifferent to the dangers of deforestation. Peter tried to explain to him that forestry actually means using the forest as the farmer uses his land, cutting out the mature and overripe trees and giving the seedlings benefit from the light that they may furnish the succeeding crop of timber. He knew that the man was intelligent enough, and explained as well as he could from such a starting point as he could recall how soon the natural resources of the country would be exhausted under the existing indifference.

"Quite a bit of wood here, mister—enough for my job," said Shad.

But after a while Peter began to make him understand and showed him what trees should be marked for cutting and why. Five came to a burned patch of at least a hundred acres.

"Is there any organized system for fighting these fires?" Peter asked.

"System? Well, when there's a fire we go and try to put it out—"

laughed Wells.

"How do the fires start?"

"Campers—burners mostly—in the deer season. Railroads sometimes—at the upper end."

"And you keep no watch for smoke?"

"Where would we watch from?"

"Towers. They ought to be built—with telephone connection to headquarters."

"It may happen. They're good-to-your jobs—and to Black Rock, too, perhaps."

"I guess Black Rock can stand it, if the wind blows right. They walked around the charred clearing and mounted a high sand dune, from which they could see over a wide stretch of country. With a high wooden platform here the whole of the Upper Reserve could be watched.

"I wonder how long that old glue foot is going to be around here— this is the first chance I've had at the morning paper— I don't get the morning paper till the evening paper comes around— and this is the first time she's been out of my easy chair since I've been home—"

"ON ANDY! COME HERE—"

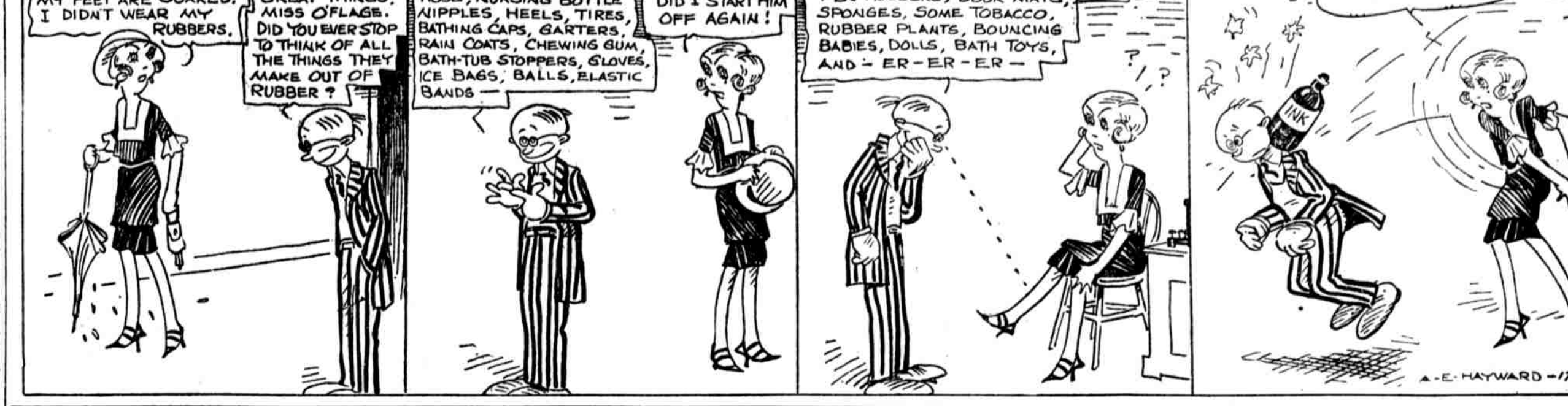
"HERE ARE TWO BOTTLES THAT I BROUGHT FOR YOU— HAD THEM IN THE HOUSE FOR OVER 10 YEARS— WE NEVER USE IT— I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO HAVE THIS GO I BROUGHT THIS FOR YOU—"

"OH MAMA— YOU JEWEL YOU— I'M GLAD MIN WASN'T AN ORPHAN— I HOPE YOU LIVE FOREVER AND NEVER GO HOME—"



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Old Thoughtful on the Job Again

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The Young Lady Across the Way

By FONTAINE FOX



The young lady across the way says conditions have changed a great deal since Washington's day, and, while he was doubtless right in advocating entangling alliances then, that certainly doesn't prove that they would be a good thing for us now.

THE POWERFUL KATRINKA

By FONTAINE FOX



THE POWERFUL KATRINKA GAVE A GOOD STRONG PULL ON THAT OLD FASHIONED DOOR BELL.

SCHOOL DAYS

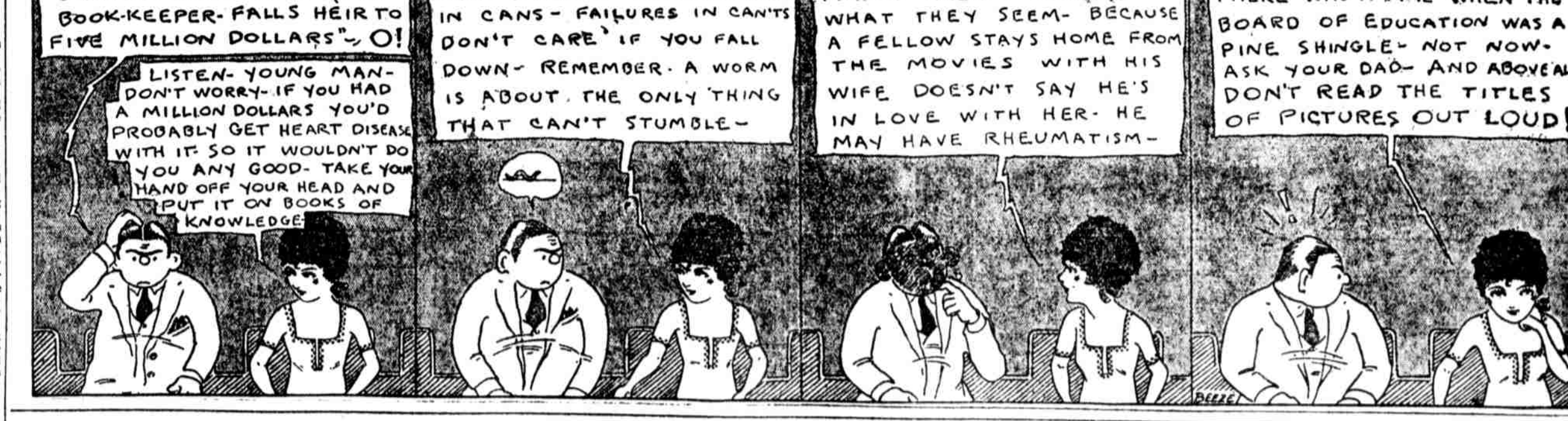
By DWIG



THE END OF A PERFECT DAY

MOVIE FAN—Advice

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PETEY—He'll Be Vice President, Maybe

By C. A. Voight

