

THE VAGRANT DUKE

By GEORGE GIBBS

Author of "The Splendid Outcast," "The Yellow Dope," "The Secret Witness," Etc.

Copyright, 1921, by D. Appleton & Co.

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 finds 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 up.

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 liked, 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."

"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 (she called it 'Jenny') 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 want, patiently, 'I don't want her to find out. Er—she couldn't understand. You know women, Nichols. They talk too much.' He paused. "It's—necessity that none of her friends in New York or mine should know of—er—any danger that threatens me. And of course—er—any danger that threatens me would—in a way—threaten her. You see?"

"I think so."

"I've put all weapons under cover. I don't want her to see 'em. So when she comes—which may be at any moment—nothing must be said about the men outside and what they're there for. In the daytime they must be given something to do, like mowing the lawn, pruning trees or weeding the driveway. Pay 'em what they ask, but don't let any of 'em go away. You'll explain this to the new men. As for yourself—er—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. "Get 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—"

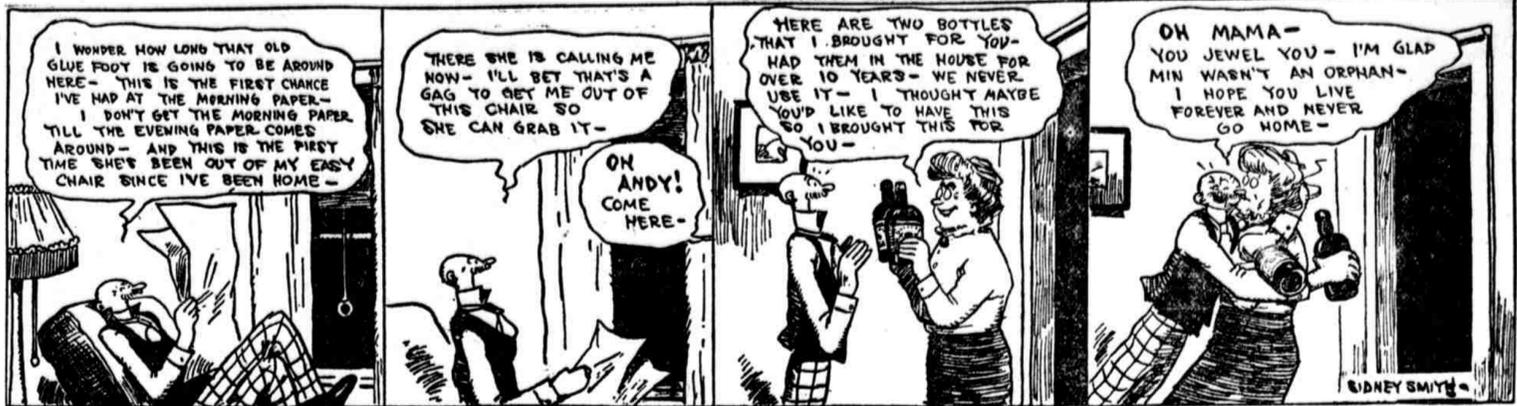
Peter rose and was about to leave the room when there was a sound of an automobile horn and the sudden roar of an exhaust outside. He followed McGuire to the window and saw a low red runabout containing a girl and a male companion emerging from the trees. A man in the road was holding up his hands in 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 driver, a 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 clapping softly in thought to himself.

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

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

THE GUMPS—The Past Is a Tomb of Regrets and Should Be Forgotten

By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Old Thoughtful on the Job Again

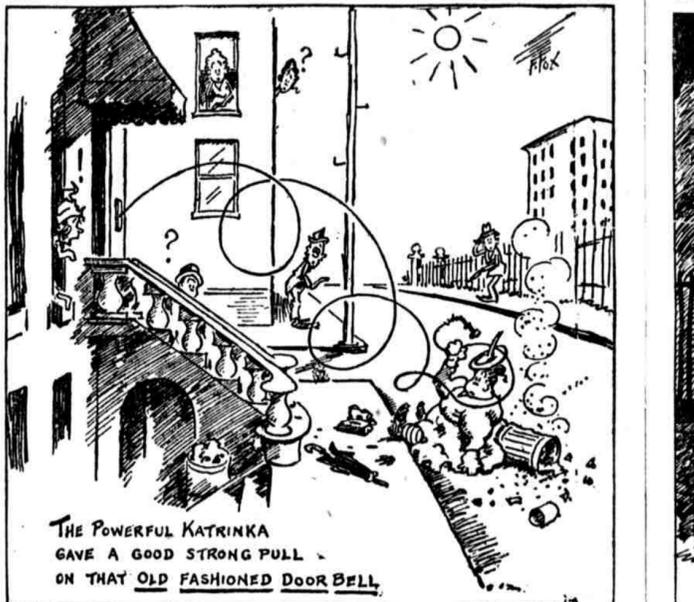
By Hayward



The Young Lady Across the Way

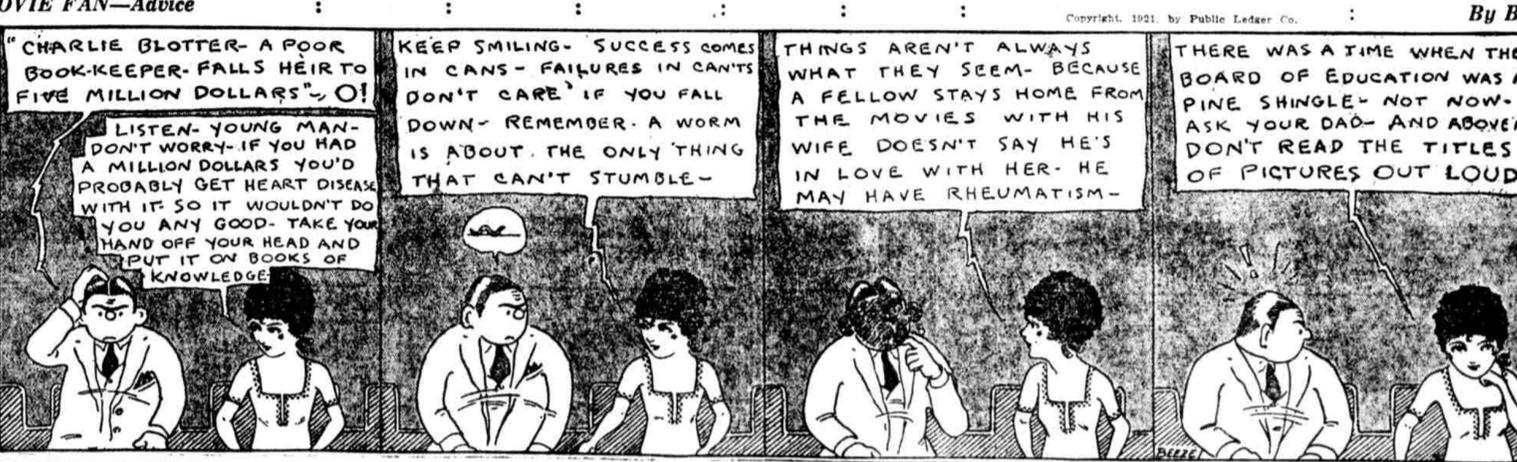
THE POWERFUL KATRINKA

SCHOOL DAYS



MOVIE FAN—Advice

By Beeze



PETEY—He'll Be Vice President, Maybe

By C. A. Voight

