

THE VAGRANT DUKE

By GEORGE GIBBS

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

Copyright, 1921, by D. Assoluto & Co.

THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Peter Nicholas, Russian Duke, exiled by revolution, comes to this country as Peter Nichols and goes to work on the streets of New York. He is blacklisted by one McGuire. Kennedy says McGuire killed Ben Cameron, McGuire's partner in prospecting. McGuire promises to give a daughter to the man who is blacklisted. In the meantime he is being shadowed, and comes from abroad that the Bolsheviks are training. Kennedy returns to the McGuire estate and questions her about her father. "What do you want to know for?" she asks.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

Beth's bent brows were frowning at the path at his feet. He tried to laugh—and the sound of the dry cackle had little mirth in it.

"No matter. I—I thought it might be better. I guess you'd better go—I guess you'd better." And with that he sank heavily in Peter's chair again.

But Beth still stood and stared at him, aware of the sudden change in his attitude toward her. What did it all mean? What were Peter's relations with this creature who behaved so strangely at the mention of her name? Why did he speak of Ben Cameron? Who was he? Who was this man? The feeling of which she had at first been conscious, at the man's evil leering smile which repelled her suddenly culminated in a pang of intuition. This man—

It must be . . . Hawk Kennedy—the man who . . .

She stared at him with a new horror in the growing pallor of her face and as though some devilish psychological clairvoyance had suddenly hooked their two consciousness to the same thought. Beth saw the same picture—the sand on the rocks, the blazing sun and a dead man lying with a knife in his back . . . And Beth continued staring as though in a kind of horrible fascination. And when her lips moved she spoke as though impelled by a force beyond her own volition.

"You—you're Hawk Kennedy," she said tensely, "the man who killed my father."

"A lie," he gasped, springing to his feet. "Who told you that?"

"I guessed it—"

"Who told you about Hawk Kennedy? Who told you about him?"

"No one—"

"You didn't dream it. You can't dream names," he said tensely. "Peter told me he lied to you."

"He didn't—"

But he had caught her by the wrist again and dragged her into the cabin. She was thoroughly frightened now—so frightened even to cry out—too terrified at the sudden revelation of this man who for some days had been a kind of evil spirit in the background of her happiness. He was not like what she had thought he was, but embodied in his face that was sinister and terrible. And while she wondered what he was going to do next he pushed her into the armchair, locked the door and put the key into his pocket.

"Now we can talk," he muttered grimly. "No chance of being disturbed—Peter ain't due for hours yet. So he's been tellin' you lies about me. Has he? Sayin' I done it. By G—, I'm aint in't to see."

He leered at her horribly, and Beth seemed frozen into her chair. The courage that had been hers a moment ago when he had shrunk away from her and fled before the fury of her questions and the violence of his touch. She was intimidated for the first time in her life and yet she tried to meet his eyes, which burned wildly, shining and terrible as side like those of a caged beast. In her terror she could not tell what countless instinct had urged her unless it was Ben Cameron's soul in agony that had cried out through her lips. And now she had not only betrayed Peter—but herself.

"I'm beginnin' to see. You and Pete 'plain' both ends against the middle. You and McGuire come down some—very handsome for a weddin' present and leavin' me out in the cold. Very pretty! But it ain't goin' to work out just that way—not that way at all."

All of this he muttered in a wildly unusual kind of way, at no one in particular, as his gaze flitted from one object in the room to another, always passing over Beth's head impersonally, but in a moment she saw his gaze concentrate upon her with sudden eagerness.

"He told ye I done it, did he? Well, I didn't," he cried in a strident voice. "I didn't do it. It was McGuire. Pete ain't fix that on me—even if he wanted to. But he told you, or ye wouldn't of spoke like ye did. I guess maybe ye wouldn't of said so much if Pete had been here. But ye let the cat slip out of the bag all right. You and Pete—and maybe McGuire's wife ye too—'gainst me. Is that so?"

"Yes, yer speak, girl? Must ye sit here just starin' at me with yer big eyes? What are ye lookin' at? Are ye dumb?"

"No, I'm not dumb," gasped Beth, struggling for her courage, aware all the while of the physical threat in the man's presence.

"Speak then. Tell me the truth. Peter told ye was your money McGuire took—your money McGuire's got to make good on it, aint that the truth?"

"Oh, yes, ye will. You'll answer all right. I'm not goin' to trifles. What ye come here to see Pete about? What's that letter ye came to give him? Give it to me!"

Beth clutched the heliograph note to her bosom, but Hawk Kennedy caught her hands and tried to tear it away with physical violence to give it the force of despair. She sprang to her feet, but he caught her by the wrist as she reached the window. She struck at him with her fists, but he tore the letter away from her and buried her toward the bed over which she fell motionless. There was no use trying to fight this man. . . . There was a faint light in his touch which spoke of merciless things. . . . And so she lay motionless, nursing her injured head, trying desperately to think what she must do.

Meanwhile, watching her keenly from the tail of his eye, Hawk Kennedy was reading the heliograph letter, spelling out the English word by word. Frenzied, Beth saw the frown of curiosity deepen to interest and then to passion.

"Interesting—very," she heard him mutter at last, as he glanced toward the door. "Holy Russia. . . . What's that mean, girl? Who is Peter Nicholas?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Where do ye get that?"

CHAPTER XIX

Yakimov Reveals Himself

It was with some misgivings that Peter left his cabin, leaving Hawk Kennedy there to sleep off the effects of his potations, but the situation at that time was so hazardous that he had no choice. Hawk had awakened early, very early, and very thirsty, but Peter had told him that there was no more whisky and threatened to throw over the whole affair if he didn't sober up and behave himself. And so, having exacted a promise from Hawk Kennedy to leave the cabin when he had had his sleep, Peter had gotten the "river" from McGuire's garage (as was his custom) and driven rapidly down toward the camp.

He had almost reached the conclusion that the copy of the partnership agreement which Hawk had held as a threat over McGuire had ceased to exist—that it had been lost, effaced or destroyed. But he wanted to be more certain of this before he came out into the open, showed his hand and McGuire's and defied the blackmailer to do his worst. He was pretty sure now from his own knowledge of the man that, desperate though he was in his intention to gain a fortune by this expedient, he was absolutely powerless to do evil without the signature of McGuire. The question as to whether or not he would make a disgraceful public display of the whole affair was important to McGuire and he had to be, if possible, for Peter had given his promise to bring the affair to a quiet conclusion.

Until he could have a further talk with McGuire, he meant to lead Hawk Kennedy on to further confidences, and with this end in view and with the further purpose of getting him away from the cabin, had promised to meet him late that afternoon at a fork of the road to the lumber camp, the other prong of which led to a settlement of several shanties where Hawk had managed to get a lodging on the previous night and on several other occasions. In his talk with the ex-walter he learned that on his previous visits the man had made a careful survey of the property and kept his way about almost as well as Peter did. It appeared that he also knew something of Peter's problems at the lumber camp and the difficulties the superintendent had already encountered in getting his sawed lumber to the railroad and in completing his fire-towers. Indeed, these difficulties seemed out of his head begun again, and it was with great regret that Peter was obliged to forego the opportunity of seeing Beth that day, perhaps even that evening. But he had told her nothing of his troubles the night before, not wishing to cloud a day so fair for them both.

The facts were these: Flynn and Jacobi, the men he had dismissed, had appeared again at the camp in his absence, bent on fomenting trouble, and Shad Wells, already inflamed against the superintendent, had fallen an easy prey to their machinations. Accidents to machinery and implements culminating at last in the blowing out of a tube of one of the boilers. It was this misfortune that had held the work up for several days until a spare boiler could be installed. Peter tried to find out how these accidents had happened, but each line of investigation led up to a blind alley. Jesse Brown, his foreman, seemed to be loyal, but he was easy-going and weak. With many of his own friends among the workers both at the camp any mile he tried to hold his job by carrying water on both shoulders and the consequences were in evitable.

He moved along the line of least resistance and the trouble grew. Peter saw his weakness and would have picked another man to supersede him, but there was no one available. The truth was that though the men's wages were high for the kind of work they were doing, the discontent that they had brought with them was in the air. The evening papers brought word of trouble in every direction, the threatened railroad and steel strikes and the prospect of a coalless winter when the miners went out as they threatened to do on the last of August.

CONTINUED TOMORROW

THE GUMPS—No News Is Bad News

By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Fresh

Copyright, 1921, by Public Ledger Company

By Hayward



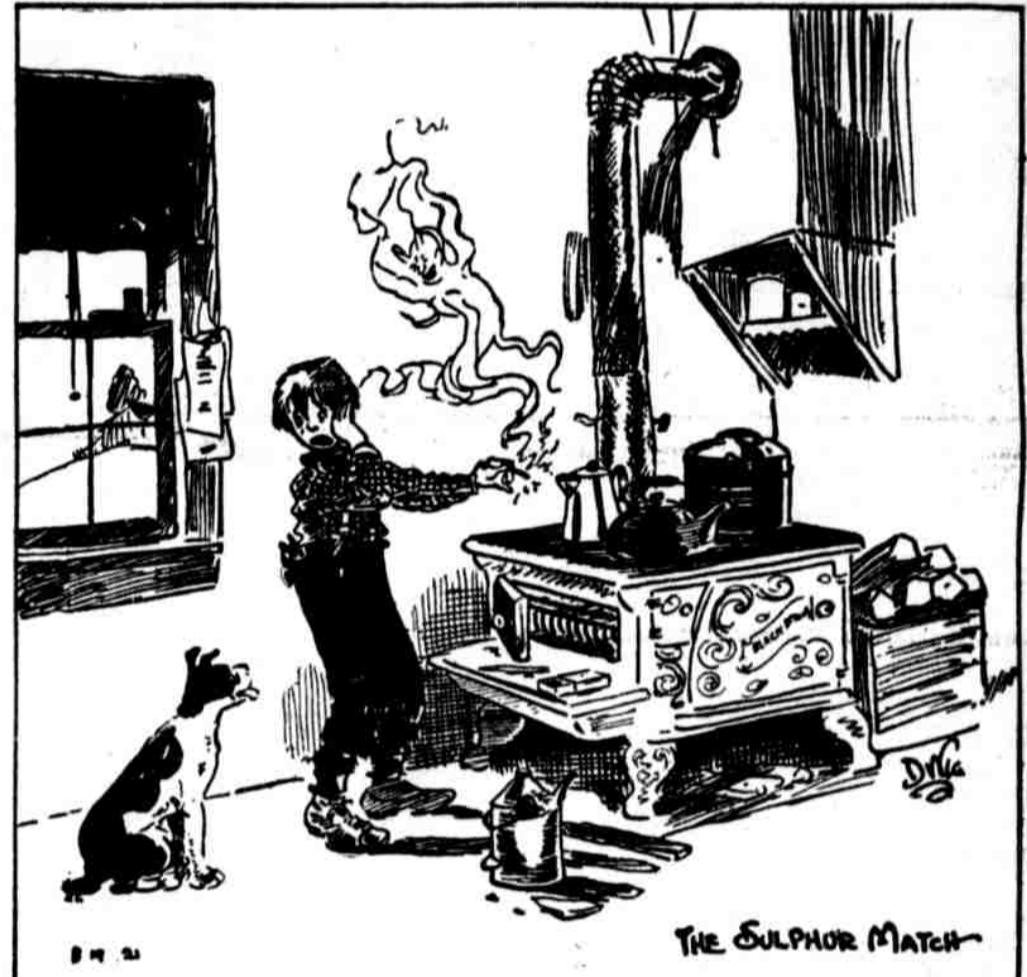
The Young Lady Across the Way

THREE CHEERS FOR THE KID

By FONTAINE FOX

SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG



MOVIE FAN—Keeping It Under 'Is Hat

Copyright, 1921, by Public Ledger Company

By Beeze



PETEY—Never Say That

By C. A. Vlobht

