

"The Grip of Evil"

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The Pillar of Light," "The Terms of Surrender," "Number 17," Etc.
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Novelized from the Series of Photoplays of the Same Name. Released by Pathe.
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Sixth Episode The Hypocrites

CHAPTER XIII.
The Tyrant.

Utterly dispirited, John Burton, tenth marquis of Castleton, sought peace after his last disillusionment. His thoughts turned with real zest to the quiet and seclusion of the open country. He cared not whether he went. The one dominant desire of a heart sick and ill at ease was to get far away from cities, to find himself under the blue skies, breathing clean air, mixing, for a while among those simpler folk who wrest a hard living from Mother Earth.

So he packed a grip with simple necessities, chose a remote district at haphazard, and boarded the train. A directory, compiled for the purpose by the railway company, gave him the address of a small town where summer boarders were received. He neither wrote in advance nor made any money, but preferred to trust to luck, which surely would not always play him false.

He neither knew nor cared what sort of place Freshfield, Vt., might be, nor what sort of people he would encounter in the Simms family, tenants of the Meadowland farm. If the locality suited his needs he meant to remain there indefinitely. If trouble befell—as he had only too good reason to dread—he could leave the place at a moment's notice.

For once in his life, John Burton yielded to a selfish feeling. He wanted rest. He wanted to escape from the ever-present shadow of Evil which seemed to attend his veiled pilgrimage through this vale of tears.

When, therefore, he alighted from the train at Freshfield, he was pleased to find himself the only passenger with business there that day. He asked the stationmaster for directions. The man eyed him curiously. It was quite evident that distinguished-looking young men, expensively, if quietly, dressed, were rare birds in that district.

"The Simms farm lies a matter of four miles away among the woods," said the official, pointing across an undulating landscape basking in the sun of a summer's afternoon. "There ain't no automobiles round about here, mister. You see that old feller over there near the buggy? That's Mike, and maybe he'll take you to Meadowland for a couple of dollars."

Some bargaining with Mike ensued, but the price was quickly agreed on, and John climbed beside the driver on the front seat of a vehicle which reminded him of the deacon's "Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" in all but the said shay's soundness of material. In effect, the poor old buggy contrived to keep intact, but the rotten harness yielded on a hill towards the close of the third mile and repairs became necessary. Mike produced a prickler and some whippcord. Evidently he was prepared for such emergencies.

"How long before you're ready to take the road again?" inquired John carefully. The delay did not irritate him. His bruised soul was already yielding to the spell of placid nature. Here were trees and brushwood, country lanes and tumbling grass. What a blissful change from the smooth ways of the city which led with such deceptive ease to the haunts of misery and crime!

"Reckon I'll be ten minutes or more fixin' this darned trace," growled Mike. "All right," said John. "Give me a hand when you're ready. I'll not be far away."

He sauntered into a wooded glade and did some botanizing among the wild flowers. This was a hobby he had taken up. Somehow, by analyzing the structure of plants he believed he drew nearer comprehending the great purpose of the Creator.

Flowers of many varieties grew in profusion on a steep bank at some little distance. Burton was busy among them, having found no less than six different species of butter cups, when he was startled and surprised by the unexpected vision of a young and pretty girl falling head-on down the bank.

She rolled almost to his feet, having obviously lost her balance at a critical moment. He would have picked her up, but she gathered herself together with the agility of a fawn, and, after one shy and embarrassed glance, took to her heels again and ran swiftly out of sight.

Not a word did the two exchange. For one instant their eyes met. Then the woodland sprite was in full flight and John was laughing heartily. He knew exactly what had happened. This maid of the wild had been surprised in finding a stranger in her domain. She had hidden in order to observe him, but curiosity was stronger than prudence—hence the fall. John returned to the broken-down buggy and related his adventures to Mike.

"That'll be the Simms gal, Jessie," was all the information vouchsafed by the grumpy driver. John reflected that if the remainder of the farmer's household was up to the first sample he had seen, some streak of belated luck must have led him to Arcady. In due course the buggy drew into the farmyard of Meadowland. The surroundings were somewhat squalid, but that element did not worry John at all. There was no sight of the fugitive, Jessie. An elderly woman, all-a-flutter because of the arrival of an unexpected visitor, and wiping scapulars from her hands on an apron came from an outhouse and inquired his business. Before John could utter a word Mike explained.

"Reckon this young man wants to board here for a spell," he said, with a knowing wink. The very tone of his voice told that prices were to be raised for the newcomer's benefit. But John only smiled. Even the bedraggled Mrs. Simms looked honest enough, and there could be no doubt whatever that she was a woman who worked hard to wrest a mere pittance from the soil.

Mike, taking charge of the situation, yelled to two bent figures hoeing in a distant turnip patch. They straightened, and came to the hail. Soon John was talking to Farmer Simms and his son, Peter, the latter a sturdy and bright-faced boy of 18. The youth was very like his sister, and John imagined, rightly as it happened, that the girl was some eighteen months younger.

In the sitting room John met Jessie, and the eyes of the two flashed an understanding. Nothing was said as to their earlier encounter, however, since John imagined that daydreaming would not be encouraged by the hard-working farmer and his wife.

He went to his room to wash and brush up after his long journey. The apartment was humbly furnished, but spotlessly clean. He felt at ease with all the world. At last, he heaved, he had found true hearts dwelling in ideal conditions.

That evening after supper John was going out for a smoke, but was given to understand that the family gathered for prayers, and would be honored by the presence of their guest. Nothing loth, he listened to the elder Simms reading a chapter from the Bible with an intonation which comported a great many verbal inaccuracies.

He could not help noting that both the boy and girl were restive, but attributed their attitude to the natural exuberance of youth. When the reading was finished, Peter sprang up eagerly and invited John to come with him to his attic. Farmer Simms frowned but said nothing, and his manifest disapproval was not noticed by the stranger.

The reason for the boy's request was soon laid bare. He had fitted a small workbench in his garret, and had constructed several crude but ingenious models of various sorts of machinery.

"I'm crazy to be an engineer," he confessed, "but father won't hear of it. Some day I'll have to get out on my own. That's just all there is to it."

The door opened, and Peter swung round in a sudden alarm difficult to understand. But the intruder was only his sister. Jessie had recovered from her fit of shyness, and now carried a portfolio of drawings which she was anxious to exhibit, yet wishfully diffident as to the opinion this tall, reserved man with the singularly expressive face would express on them.

John soon put the girl at ease. Examining the drawings, he found, as was only to be expected, that they broke every rule of art, even as he understood it. Yet they displayed some force of conception, and the color sketches were distinctly good. To his thinking, both brother and sister merely lacked training. Neither might be a genius, but there was no gainsaying the fact that the muses, rather than the rough ways of husbandry, appealed very strongly to these two.

Somehow, the girl seemed to be excited to a pitch hardly warranted by the conditions of the moment. Her pretty face was flushed, her bright eyes were shining, and her hands manifestly trembled.

"I don't want you to feel afraid merely because you are exhibiting your work," he said soothingly, attributing her agitation to the natural nervousness of one who was little more than a child in years.

"Oh, it isn't that, Mr. Burton," tittered Jessie. "Soon after seeing you today I was chased by a bull—"

"You were not hurt?" he broke in. She reddened more deeply, the hot blood incarnading even the shapely throat and neck.

"No," she said, with stammering hesitancy. "It might have been—but a genuine, an artist—ran up—and—saved me!"

Now, the fact was that Jessie had been rescued from a really grave predicament by a young artist named Robert West, who, like Burton himself, had fled from the city to seek inspiration in the country. West had quite valiantly chased away a young bull which, in the stupid manner of such animals, was angered because Jessie happened to stumble and fall while running across a field. He had thereupon picked the girl up in his arms and carried her to safety, and her whole being tingled yet with the memory of that lovelike embrace, since Robert West, impressionable as any of his tribe, had been in no hurry to set this delightful sprite on her feet again.

Peter Simms was eyeing his sister curiously, and to save the girl further embarrassment, John turned the talk back to the sketches.

"It seems to me," he said, "that if you were given lessons by a good master, you could accomplish some really excellent work. You have a sense of atmosphere, and your ideas of color strike me as daring, yet not too farfetched."

The three heads were bent over the sketch, which provided a text for this criticism, when a rough hand snatched away not only the drawing which John held, but the whole of Jessie's collection. The farmer, suspecting the purpose of this gathering in the attic, had crept stealthily upstairs, and now snorted like the bull which had threatened his daughter. He was sallow with anger, and his deepest eyes glinted evilly.

"This foolishness has got to stop here," he growled. "You, I see, will be a farmer like me, and I see you will be a farmer's wife, like her mother, or I'll know the reason why."

Then, in a burst of brutality, he tore up the girl's drawings, and, turning to the bench, seized a mallet with which he smashed each of his son's models. Jessie burst into tears and ran out. Peter's face blanched, and his fists clenched, but John caught him by the shoulder and restrained him by a warning pressure. He well knew that protest was useless where a man of Farmer Simms' bovine intelligence was concerned. Indeed, Simms himself regarded the incident as closed, and went out. Giving the distressed boy a reassuring pat, Burton followed.



THORPE OBJECTS TO THE ARTIST BEING WITH HIS SWEETHEART.

The next day happened to be a Sunday, and a Sabbath peace descended on the household. John accompanied the Simmses to church, where the farmer was evidently held in high esteem, being an elder of the community. After the service, when groups of residents gathered for a few minutes' chat before going their separate ways, a big, hulking fellow approached and hailed the Simms family with gruff cordiality. Simms introduced the newcomer.

"This is Mr. Thorpe," he said, with a significant look at Burton. "He's the man who has spoke for Jessie, and he'll make her a good husband, too."

The significance of this needlessly frank statement was not lost on John. It was clearly meant as a climax to the strained situation of the previous night. Thorpe grinned, and at once took Jessie away in the direction of the farm, so John merely uttered a casual "Indeed?" and followed with the others.

Thorpe did not go far. Waving a hand to Simms, he lifted his hat in awkward farewell of the girl, and turned into a path leading to his own homestead, whereupon Burton had to hear a long discourse on the man's qualifications as Jessie's prospective bridegroom, his main asset, apparently, being a well stocked farm clear of any mortgage.

After the midday meal, Burton invited the two young people to accompany him for a walk. The farmer gave a grudging assent and the three went off. John purposely steered the conversation clear of personal matters. He spoke of the benefits of education, even in agricultural pursuits, and tried to show that farming ought to be as scientific as any other occupation.

He laid particular stress on the quiet happiness attainable by reading good books, and, choosing a sunlit clearing near a stream, invited the others to sit down while he read a few selected passages from Ruskin's "Sesame and Lilies."

Peter Simms listened eagerly, but the girl's mind seemed to wander. Whether by accident or design, Burton could never determine afterwards, she got up after a little while and began picking flowers. Soon she was hidden by the trees, but John and her brother assumed that she was not far distant. Now, the fact was that Jessie either knew, or guessed accurately, where a certain good-looking young artist would be found at work. At West, she undoubtedly met Robert West, and the two began an earnest talk, which quickly developed into Jessie's posing as a model while West sketched her.

This, of course, was very delightful to the artistic temperament at sweet seventeen, and the well-considered compliments of the town-bred man made strange music in the girl's ears. In a word, matters were progressing quite nicely when Bill Thorpe chanced in on an idyl. By unfortunate chance, he happened to pass that way while making for the Meadowland farm, and his anger at the sight of what he regarded as desecration of the Sabbath was heightened by jealousy.

He approached so threateningly that Jessie screamed, and West sprang up to protect her, whereupon he was sent reeling by a blow from a man twice his weight and of much stronger physique. Disregarding his prostrate rival, Thorpe seized the girl, lifted her in a bear-like hug and carried her home. Naturally, she screamed and struggled, but her appeals fell on deaf ears. They did, however, reach the ears of Burton and her brother, who feared that some evil had befallen her, and could not at first determine where to search. When at last they hit on the right direction and ran in swift pursuit, they were too late to prevent Thorpe from fulfilling his loutish purpose. Setting the girl on the ground in front of her astonished father, who, with Mrs. Simms, was seated in the porch, he bawled angrily.

"Nice thing, ain't it, that a feller should find the girl he's going to marry carryin' on with a dude down there in the woods?"

"What'd y' mean?" cried Simms, rising slowly and blinking at the accuser and his captive.

"Just what I've said," was the furious answer. "Some artist chap is layin' around Freshfield, and your Jessie was down there settin' for him, ter a picture, on the Sabbath."

Each phrase formed a wrathful crescendo which seemed to arouse in Simms an almost maniacal rage. He eyed the girl vindictively for a few seconds.

said at last to Thorpe, "and I'll teach her a lesson she won't forget in a hurry."

Lumbering into the house, he emerged with a rawhide whip and, without further ado, began lashing the shrieking girl mercilessly. The unhappy mother tried to interfere, but Simms pushed her aside with a violence that almost amounted to a blow. This, then, was the scene which met the eyes of John Burton and Peter Simms as they ran up a frantic girl held in the grasp of one human brute, and quivering under the blows of another, while her hapless mother could only stand by in tearful dismay and witness her degradation.

CHAPTER XIV. The Outcome of Tyranny.

No matter what the consequences, Burton resolved to put a stop to this outrage. He rushed forward and was dimly aware that Peter, who had uttered an inarticulate howl when he saw his mother struck, had raced ahead of him into the house. Grappling Simms, he stayed the infuriated man's arm for a moment, whereupon Thorpe closed with him and, finding the opponent of different metal to an effeminate artist, put forth all his great strength. John, therefore, had to defend himself, and was bitterly aware that the elder Simms was not to be deflected from his cruel intent, but was now holding the terrified girl with one hand and wielding the whip with the other. It looked as though a very serious struggle was imminent when every eye turned at a hysterical yell from Peter Simms. The boy was standing in the doorway and covering his father with a noisome effusion of mud.

"Stop that!" he cried. "Stop it, I tell you, or I swear I'll shoot!"

That horrible whip, raised for another blow, dropped to the farmer's side, and the man gazed in sheer astonishment at the son who thus dared to threaten him. He could scarcely believe his ears. Never before had any member of his family flouted his authority. Thorpe, equally amazed, wrenched himself free from Burton, and was obviously more inclined to witness this new phase in a dramatic situation than continue a struggle in which he was likely to be worsted.

"Put down that gun, Peter!" shouted John, authoritatively, striding toward the desperate boy.

"Not me!" came the defiant reply. "I'll not see my mother and sister ill treated by any man, whether he's my father or not! This horsewhipping proposition has to stop right now, or I'll end it with an ounce of buckshot!"

"You hear me, father? I mean what I say! Drop that whip, or I'll blow the top of your head off!"

Farmer Simms could hardly have been more staggered had his son literally carried out the threat. He was almost palsied with anger and bewilderment. The girl, finding herself free, ran to her brother as though seeking from him the protection denied her elsewhere.

At last Simms recovered his senses. He pointed toward the highway. "Get out of this!" he said, mounding words with bitter emphasis. "Get out now! You ain't no children of mine no longer. Neither bite nor snip will either of you have under my roof again. Get out, just as you are! You can both starve by the roadside for anything that I care!"

The hapless mother broke in, but her appeal was ruthlessly swept aside. "You've got to stay here, Marty," said her husband, "but them two are gone back on my word yet."

It was quite certain that the man's decision was final and irrevocable. Even the maddened boy and the weeping girl were aware of that. Peter's chin lifted and a determined look replaced the momentary frenzy which had convulsed his young face.

"Good," he said defiantly. "That's what we want—both of us. Good-by, mother. We'll see you later, I guess. Come along, Jessie. I'll take care of you all right."

Peter was sufficiently self-possessed to murmur some words of thanks, but poor Jessie could only weep as though her heart was broken. They passed away down the road until hidden by a bend. Burton was left to face the two infuriated men and a nearly distraught woman.

Realizing that argument was useless, and seeing that Thorpe was by no means keen on facing him once more in a fair fight, John entered the house and packed his few belongings. Then he made his way to the village and found Mike, who drove him to the station.

There was no news of the two young people, and Burton did not care to get gossiping tongues wagging by telling what had befallen at the farm. He half expected to find them at the depot, but they did not put in an appearance, so, with a sad heart, he took the next train for home.

However, the pair turned up at his house on the following afternoon. Entrusting them to the care of a reliable man servant, he secured them respectable lodgings, gave them sufficient money to purchase a small stock of clothing and promised to look after them until Peter was established in an engineering works and Jessie had undergone a thorough training in an art school.

Out of evil might come good, he fancied. Nothing but misery awaited such alert young minds in the sordid environment of Meadowland farm. A break was bound to occur sooner or later. Certainly, the manner of the change left much to be desired, but it was fortunate that the youngsters were still at an age when careful tuition was possible and characters might be molded anew.

Some weeks passed in this way. Jessie attended an art school, but Peter did not at once avail himself of a proffered opening in the mechanical department of an iron works. He explained that his utter ignorance would prove a serious handicap and wished to devote some time to text books before undertaking practical work. Burton, mindful of his own early experiences, fully approved of this project.

He could not devote much time to actual supervision of the young people's studies, but contented himself with a weekly visit, when it was his habit to settle their accounts in the boarding house and hand to Peter a few dollar bills wherewith the inevitable expenses of residence in a city might be met. Generally he called on a fixed day, though Peter was supposed to be always at home in steady devotion to his books, while Jessie's hours at the art school were limited to the mornings only.

One week-end Burton decided to go out of town, so he paid his wonted visit to Peter and his sister a day earlier than usual. They were at home, as he anticipated, but even he, a pre-occupied man, never inclined to be suspicious of his fellows, could not help noticing that while Jessie, to all intents and purposes, was dusting the furniture, her jacket and a decidedly smart hat had evidently been thrown aside in a hurry. Peter, too, though seated at a table with an open book and a copybook in front of him, had clearly not made many notes of late, because the ink was dry on the paper and the pen he held in his hand had not been plunged in the inkstand.

The weather was fine, however, and it was only natural that two healthy youngsters should plan an outing together, so John merely asked as to their well-being, and was assured that they were working hard and felt very happy. Then he gave them their regular allowance of pocket money. Something in Jessie's manner impelled him to hand her an extra five-dollar bill.

"There," he said pleasantly, "you girls are always in need of some small trinkery or other. You can be extravagant this week."

She thanked him with a grateful smile, and he went out soon afterward. He would certainly have been surprised and shocked had he heard brother and sister chortling with glee when the door closed on him. But enlightenment was nearer than he imagined. He had not been at home more than an hour, and a man was already packing a grip for the projected journey, when a visitor was announced—a lady with whose name Burton was unfamiliar. He received her in the library, and found himself looking at a woman of very attractive appearance, but whose somewhat too flashy attire impelled him to give his manservant a secret signal which meant "remain within call." Unhap-

pily such safeguards were essential if a young man of great wealth meant to avoid certain snares laid for his unwary feet.

The lady, however, seemed to be in genuine distress. She seated herself with an air of abandon. When she lifted her veil, John saw that her eyes were swimming with tears.

"I hope you will pardon this intrusion," she said, obviously speaking with a calmness induced by strong effort, "but I know you are interested in the welfare of a girl named Jessie Simms—"

"Yes, what of her?" he broke in anxiously, because this woman's manner conveyed a hint of threatened disaster.

"She's gone the same way as I've gone, and hundreds more like me, into the passionate outdoors. That's why I'm here, Mr. Burton. You had lead set on saving her. Why should I let her go? I'm playing my own hand, and I'll stick to it. If I should all right with Robert West, the celebrated artist, you know I was his model, and everything was O. K. But now he wants no more except Jessie Simms. He's simply crazy about her."

Robert West? Was not that the name of the man whose devotion to art on a certain unfortunate Saturday had led to the disruption of the Simms household? Burton glanced at his informant keenly.

"Are you sure of your facts?" he demanded. "No matter what your quarrel with Mr. West may be, you should not drag an innocent girl into it."

"Innocent girl, indeed! I like that! She put my nose out of joint in less than a week, anyhow. If you don't believe it, come and see for yourself!"

John was sick with apprehension. The woman's words were horribly convincing, yet he strove bravely to defend an ideal.

"Little more than an hour ago I left this girl and her brother hard at work in their apartment."

The other laughed shrilly. "The brother is just as bad as the sister," she vociferated. "If you want him now, you'll find him in a pool-room, playing with the money you were fool enough to give him. But I'm not worrying about him. Jessie Simms is in West's studio at this minute. You have a car, haven't you? Take me there and you'll soon find out whether I'm lying or not."

There was nothing else for it. Burton had to face one more disconcerting exposure. Deferring his departure from the city to a later train, he ordered the car and gave the chauffeur an address supplied by his companion. They alighted at a studio building. The lady, being well known there as a model, had no difficulty in leading Burton to West's flat without being announced.

"Now," she whispered vindictively, halting in front of a closed door and producing a latchkey, "walk right in and put the double cross on Mr. Robert West!"

The woman seemed so sure of her position that, after a momentary hesitation, John opened the door, traversed a carpeted passage and entered a room which his guide indicated by a silent gesture.

No intruder could have appeared at a more awkward moment. There was no sketching toward, Jessie Simms was in West's arms, and their lips had just met in a long and lingering kiss!

Of course the two started apart. Jessie uttered a slight scream, but her pretty eyes sparkled now with angry dismay rather than girlish confusion. She realized that this discovery meant

the killing of the goose which laid the golden eggs. As for West, he was inclined to bluster, but a hot protest died on his lips when he caught sight of Burton's companion.

Somehow he guessed Burton's identity, Jessie having been quite outspoken as to the circumstances which preceded her dramatic departure from the farm. He knew, too, that he and the girl were the victims of a woman's vengeance. Still, putting a bold front on matters, he belittled a demand for an explanation. John did not answer, but gazed sadly at Jessie Simms, whose fortitude promptly deserted her, because she hid her flushed face in her hands and began sobbing.

"I've nothing to say," he announced at last. "I neither explain nor apologize. That poor girl can tell you why I'm here."

He turned and went out, paying no heed to the bitter taunts which the obscured model was now flinging at the artist. Entering his car, he bade the man go home. He was minded at first to call and see Peter, but felt unequal to any further strain that day. When all was said and done, he had left his word to the boy and his sister, and meant visiting them during the following week, when perhaps the girl might have repented her folly and be willing to start afresh.

His mind was so taken up with brooding thoughts that he did not notice a disturbance in the street until the car stopped, being unable to advance further owing to a dense crowd which had gathered in front of a saloon. The heads and shoulders of a couple of policemen were tossing to and fro in the center of the mob, and at last the untamed men seemed to swing the crowd with them in the direction of a police telephone box.

John let down the window and leaned out. "What is the matter?" he inquired of a bystander.

"Oh, nothing much, sir," said the man. "Just a couple of young drunks started fightin' in the saloon. They wouldn't quit, even when they was chucked out, so now the cops have got 'em and they're in for thirty days apiece."

The car moved on. One of the policemen was ringing for a patrol wagon, while the other held the would-be combatants at arm's length. And one of them was Peter Simms, the student whom Burton himself had seen that same afternoon poring over his books and, of course, quite sober. He halted the car again, meaning to interfere. It happened that the man to whom he had spoken before was walking alongside, and John addressed him excitedly.

"Why, I know one of those boys," he said. "His name is Simms, and I can vouch for it that little over an hour ago he was no more under the influence of liquor than I am."

"Are you the gentleman who pays his board bills and gives him money?" inquired the other curiously.

"Yes."

"Well, take my tip, sir, and let up on the game. He's just playing you for a sucker. I was in that very saloon when he came in and told the crowd you had flashed an extra five-spot on him and his sister this week!"

Utterly disheartened, John sank back into a corner of the luxurious limousine. Evil showed no signs of relaxing its grip on humanity. His well-meant assistance had only made easy the downward path for Jessie Simms, and opened the prison door to her brother.

(End of Sixth Episode.)

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