

# "The Grip of Evil"

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The Pillar of Light," "The Terms of Surrender," "Number 17," Etc.  
By LOUIS TRACY  
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## Eighth Episode--In Bohemia

### CHAPTER XV. The Irrepressibles.

One evening at dusk John Burton was seated in his study killing the half hour which intervened before he must go to his dressing room and change his clothes for dinner. For some reason his thoughts were tinged with an unusual melancholy. He found himself reviewing the bygone years, and the singular conclusion was borne in on him that he had never been really happy since he ceased to earn a living by manual labor.

He was now a marquis and a man of great means, yet, in the midst of a palatial establishment, with a troop of servants ready to obey his slightest wish, and an expensive French chef even then preparing his solitary meal, he suddenly realized that the last genuine pleasure within recollection had nothing whatsoever to do with titles and luxuries.

He remembered the occasion perfectly well. He had been five years at work in a foundry when the manager of his department stopped him one morning as he passed the check office and said offhandedly: "Burton, in future, you take charge as foreman, and draw down \$25 per week. Make good, and it'll be thirty at the end of the month!"

Although John had deserved promotion, it was none the less sweet when it came. Now, after the full years, came the bitter thought that not only had he not really earned a cent by honest toil, but that all the joy seemed to have gone out of life. Moved by uncontrollable impulse he sprang to his feet and ran upstairs two steps at a time. His valet was arranging the studs in a dress suit.

"Quit that!" said John, cheerfully. "I'm off on a trip. Take charge here till I come back. My lawyers will attend to the necessary expenses."

"For what period shall I pack, sir?" inquired the man.

"Nothing doing," grinned John. "I'll fix things for myself."

"You can always make good after a week's work, but who's going to buy little images of soft clay, the same as she turns out? and a jerk indicated the retreating figure. "Why, she can't even raise the wind to buy a block of stone. I'll go and fire her right away."

John had caught a glimpse of a sweet face, with big, artistic eyes of myosotis blue; eyes of that wonderful tint which becomes a deep and tender violet when shaded, and wished that he dared intercede in the defaulter's behalf. If, however, he really meant persevering in his latest role it was ludicrously impossible that he should go about the world playing the part of stage uncle to everyone in distress.

So he entered his room and, being somewhat tired, stretched himself at full length on the bed for a smoke and a hard "think."

The weather being warm, he left the door ajar, and soon became aware that a somewhat lively crew occupied a suite on the same landing. The janitor's heavy footsteps sounded on the stairs. Apparently he had gone straight to the girl's apartment, and John guessed, quite accurately, it happened that a grateful warning had been given and tearfully received.

Seemingly a similar errand was imminent for the noisy, laughing young fellows whose chatter reached John clearly through the open door.

Indeed, he heard the man say loudly: "I'm bringing you fellows a final notice. You're three weeks behind now, and if ain't paid tomorrow--"

"Hush," gurgled a rich flutelike voice. "Don't utter another word and I'll show you where we keep the demon."

John's curiosity was aroused. He rose and went to the door, and saw a very tall and phenomenally thin young man leading the janitor into the opposite flat. The uncouth Irishman was somewhat startled by that word "demon," and his guiding sat urning air was mystifying. At any rate, he was silenced for the moment and suffered himself to be taken across the room towards a cabinet which the tall young man suddenly threw open.



BURTON TRIES TO SHOW MARY SHE WILL NOT BE HAPPY WITH THE ARTIST.

He seemed to exude a breathless admiration. "Wonderful!" he murmured softly to himself. "I didn't think there was anyone within a thousand miles who could create anything like that. But where on earth did she get her model?"

Now, Mary Ames was well aware that Parker's appreciation of her work was genuine. She knew, too, that praise from Sir Rupert was praise indeed, and her heart swelled with momentary pride. Yet she had to find commonplace words somehow.

"Have you called on me, Mr. Parker?" she inquired.

The intruder spun round on his heels. "A thousand pardons," he said, bowing gracefully. "I am here by mistake. I am horribly hard up for a model, Miss Ames. The new state art gallery has commissioned a mural painting of spring, and I can no more find a girl to pose for it than if I were asking for one cut out of a solid diamond. I called here tonight meaning to ask Reggie Burke if he could assist me. I misunderstood the janitor, and mounted one floor too high. Finding the door ajar, I peeped in, and saw your charming little study of a fawn. Do be kind, Miss Ames, and lend me your model. I'll pay her full time, both for you and for myself."

The girl blushed furiously, and her eyes darted a sidelong glance at a full-length mirror standing close to the wall. Parker understood. She was her own model!

Of course, he maintained his sordid style. Since he did not wish now for regular employment, he accepted Brother Billy's offer, and helped in the work of the mission settlement. But John was a poor actor, being ever too ready to let his heart govern his head. He encountered so much real misery that he felt compelled to alleviate some of it, and either distributed money surreptitiously when he knew it would do good or assisted broken-down families into a new environment where work might be obtained and comforts secured.

Brother Billy's keen brain soon penetrated the young millionaire's disguise. A few tactful inquiries in other quarters, a few well-thrown flies in the shape of comments on men and affairs--casts which John rose at open-mouthed and unsuspecting--quickly made the evangelist aware of his protégé's identity. He chuckled, but said nothing. He was content to thank Providence for the wonder-working assistant who had come to him out of the world.

So John was more or less master of his own time and contrived his attendances at the mission in such wise that he was free to associate every evening with his four new friends.

One night, when the Irrepressibles had gone to some revel arranged by men of their own set, John sat in his room and probed deep into his heart. In other words, he tried to survey Mary Ames from every point of view as the partner of his future life. She filled the bill adequately. She was beautiful and would grace his board as his mistress. She was well educated. He might never fear that her graces would be dimmed when she dazzled and astonished the world as the marchioness of Castleton. Above all, her timid and trusting nature wrapped her like some delicate gauze which half revealed, half hid, the fascinating creature of flesh and blood beneath.

After half an hour of close self-communion he resolved to put his fortunes to the test, then and there. Walking upstairs, he knocked at Mary's door, knowing that the girl was in, since they had parted on the landing, she having announced wistfully that she meant to take a little time in solitude "to solve a problem."

She hung her head and muttered brokenly that it was silly to give way like that, but she could not help it. He placed a hand gently on her shoulder.

"Won't you confide in me, dear?" he said.

It was the first time he had ventured on any real tenderness in word or act, and the girl lifted her streaming eyes to his.

"There are some things which a woman cannot tell a man, even a friend whom she prizes," she sobbed.

Then John knew that he was face to face with the great adventure. He took her by the shoulders and half raised her from the bench where she was sitting.

"God help me! I don't even know what I shall say when he comes!" John realized vaguely that love-making or consolation was not to be thought of just then. He felt, too, that Mary must be left to work out her own salvation, and there was a grim satisfaction in the notion that while the girl was battling to protect all that a woman holds most sacred, he would assist her materially by smashing Evan Parker's face to pulp.

The two stricken people were made aware by hilarious sounds beneath that the Irrepressibles had returned unexpectedly. Somehow, the boys' harmless mirth grated at that instant, and John went out, dodging into his own room until he could be certain that his friends would not see him crossing the landing. Then he crept downstairs, meaning to seek Parker in the artist's luxurious studio.

In his rage against Parker he did not guess that his own visit to Mary might have a disastrous sequel. In fact, it nerved the girl to make up her mind, once and for all. She could endure the struggle no longer. Screwing her resolution to the pitch of sacrifice, she lifted the clay model of her statuette carefully in her arms, carried it into the disheveled living rooms where the three Irrepressibles were sprawled in as much ease as their ramshackle furniture would permit, and, sweeping aside some cooking utensils on the table, deposited there her one precious gift.

"I am going away, dear boys!" she sobbed, heedless of the amazed silence which greeted this dramatic entry of their tear-stained idol. "I am going far, far away. You'll never see me again, and I want you to keep this--in remembrance--of--Princess Mary!"

She rushed out without another word, and three pipes fell with one accord from three wide-open mouths.

"What's bitten Mary?" growled Reggie Burke, who was the first to recover the power of speech.

"She's not been herself for some time," muttered Pierce. "Haven't you fellows noticed?"

Tom Delancey, for all his good humor and lightheartedness, was the shrewdest of the trio.

running in dismay. None dared to interfere, whereupon someone sent for the police. It chanced that Brother Billy was actually talking to a roundsmen when a terrified housemaid blurted out the amazing statement that a strange man, who gave his name as John Burton, was trying to kill Mr. Parker.

The two hurried after the maid, but, while on the way, Brother Billy thought it high time to reveal John's status. The policeman was surprised, of course, but the knowledge that he was dealing with a millionaire marquis modified his attitude considerably. John was getting the better of Parker and had almost succeeded in breaking the scoundrel's right wrist when the policeman dashed in and dragged him off his victim.

Parker, whose senses had never deserted him, glared balefully at his assailant, but motioned the policeman that he was willing to eject the intruder from his house.

"I'll bring no charge," he snarled. "I'll deal with him in another way. I know how to hurt him, the brute! I'll hit him worse than he can ever hit me!"

John understood, but had no option at that moment save to accompany the policeman. He had barely gone out when Mary dashed in. She was so wild-eyed with frenzied resolve that she did not notice at first the disheveled condition of the room and the battered state of the artist's furniture. But she had seen John walking down the street with a policeman, and a second glance told her what had happened.

"Did Burton attack you?" she demanded hysterically.

"Yes," was the savage answer. "How did he come to know of my letter?"

"I showed it to him. He asked me to marry him."

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