

# "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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## 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."

Producing a bunch of keys, he unlocked a drawer which the valet was never allowed to open, and astonished his servant by bringing forth an old and worn suit of blue serge, the "everyday best" rig of his working days, which, with a thick flannel shirt, he proceeded to don forthwith.

The man smiled. He believed his master was bent on some Haroun al Raschid escapade, and the marquis of Castleton was sufficiently erratic in his behavior at times that the incident should pass without comment.

Beyond a plentiful supply of money John brought nothing with him which savored of the dignity he was leaving behind. He meant giving himself a genuine test. He took train for a neighboring town, ate a meal at a small restaurant (to be candid, he found the food coarse and unpalatable) and set about finding a lodging such as would be suitable to a mechanic out of work. A friendly policeman directed him, and the man's sunburned face looked so kindly and sympathetic that John asked him where he might seek employment with some prospect of success. Just then a row in the street called for the intervention of the law.

Two men were fighting, and the policeman was about to grab the pair of them when an elderly, wizened man, fully 65 years of age, ran from a dilapidated building labeled "Mission Hall," and thrust himself between the pugilists.

"Come, now, Jim, and you, Tom!" cried the peacemaker amiably. "what's all this about? Why should two good pals like you try to settle a dispute like a couple of snarling curs? All right, officer, he went on, winking at the policeman, "I'll fix things. This stupid scrap ends here and now. Neither of 'em will hit Brother Billy--will you, please?"

The combatants looked sheepish. One volunteered an explanation which the other capped by demanding fiercely:

"Why didn't you tell me that sooner?"

So the row was settled. Incidentally, John made the acquaintance of one who had devoted his whole life to the service of his fellows. Brother Billy invited him to enter the Mission hall, and looked puzzled on hearing that his new friend was in search of work. The missionary was a judge of men. One glance at the young millionaire's clean-cut, thoughtful and self-reliant face told him that there was no waster, but a man well able to take care of himself.

"I could do with your help here," he said instantly. "Sometimes my lambs grow troublesome sheep and require rather strenuous handling."

"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 flutlike 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 star turned into a 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.

The janitor stepped back a pace, evidently expecting to see something uncanny, but his fascinated eyes merely rested on a few glasses and a big black bottle labeled "The Demon Rum."

A ribald yell from some unseen spectators greeted his surprise. The Irishman took the situation and the rum went humorously, and went out without delivering the ultimatum. John could not help overhearing what followed. He became aware that the lanky person flourished a five-dollar bill, the sight of which evidently induced a momentary stupefaction in his friends.

"Tell you what, boys," chortled the youngster, "we'll celebrate tonight. I've actually disposed of a masterpiece."

"Bring Mary," shouted someone. "She's as hard up as we are."

The suggestion was acted upon instantly, and John knew that a party, testing but laughing girl, was being dragged forcibly downstairs. But the brotherhood of the arts did not end there. He heard the tall young man say:

"That's four of us. We want a fifth, since there's luck in odd numbers, as witness the five in this bill. There's a new lodger across the way. Perhaps he's hungry, too."

Thus it came about that John found himself in Bohemia, and was soon shaking hands with Mary Ames, sculptress; Reggie Burke, cartoonist; Tom Delancey, writer, and Charlie Pierce, musician.

The three men had been dubbed "The Irrepressibles" by their friends, and never was the title better deserved. They were bubbling over with human kindness; the wine of life seemed ever to dance in their eyes and effervescence in their heads. But that they were real good fellows there could be no doubt whatever, and John was not long in summing them up from the scraps of conversation which reached his ears while supper was being prepared.

Mary Ames was regarded as a fairy princess, and always addressed with ceremony. Tom Delancey officiated as cook, and his friends were dispatched on errands to the neighboring stores. Hence, John had a few minutes' sustained talk with Mary. She was very much taken by the girl. She was frankly an unsophisticated, and made no secret of the fact that her devotion to the sculptor's art, while suffering for her emotions, brought neither food nor raiment.

The foragers returned, and a most appetizing meal was soon sizzling and frizzling on a gas stove. Suddenly the cook uttered a cry of dismay.

"Dash it, if I haven't gone and forgotten the salt! There isn't a midget in the place as would fill a midget's eye."



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!

"Oh, he said, "is that it?" Evidently astonished, and not a little amused, Parker was gentleman enough to spare the girl any embarrassment. Bending again over the nymph in the clay, he said quietly:

"My eyes cannot take in more than one such wondrous creation at a time. I might have guessed the truth, because no other model in this city could possibly have inspired this figure. You have a masterpiece here. Of course, there are faults, due to lack of training, but these weigh as nothing against the sure touch of the artist and the true sense of form. I hadn't the least notion that you could do work like this. What a pity! What a pity!"

Mary arched here eyebrows as the artist gave her a swift and searching glance.

"I hate pretence," he went on quietly. "You are too poor to study under the master you need. Isn't that so? Don't I know too well what it means? Many a day have I worked in Julien's and sustained an exhausted nature on a 10-centime roll bought for breakfast and another for dinner. Now, let me suggest a way out of your difficulties. I mean no offense. I speak as one artist to another. I am sorely in need of just such a model as that from which you have fashioned your maid. Will you pose for me? I'll pay you well--and I may be able to help you in other ways. Think it over, and let me know."

Just then Tom Delancey shouted for the salt. Little wonder if Mary's eyes shone and her mind was distraught. She was not exactly battling against temptation. That had not come yet, but she was in sore need, and Evan Parker's offer reached her within a few minutes after the janitor had said quite unmistakably that she must either pay her rent or quit.

### CHAPTER XVI. Mary's Decision.

During the next three weeks John lived in a dun paradise, for paradise is not an earthly garden, but a heaven on earth of man's own creation, and can be found more often in the hovels of the poor than in the palaces of the rich.

He thoroughly enjoyed the society of the Irrepressibles and, marvelous to relate, had fallen head over heels in love with Mary Ames. The girl's beauty and a naturally sweet disposition combined with her artistic leaning to single her out as a desirable wife. Moreover, what a delight it

would be if he could woo and win her as a mere workman, and lead her on their wedding day into that glittering circle of rank and wealth for which every young and good-looking woman is inclined, no matter what her other ideals may be.

Of course, he maintained his soldierly 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."

John had smiled at the words. He believed she was referring to the ever-present burden of debt. He knew that Mary had tried in vain to secure an artist's commission for completion of the statuette, but not a man among the local fraternity had sense enough to see the real merit of the clay model. They even refused to give her the means of turning the soft mold into lasting marble.

He smiled pleasantly now at thought of the wonderment which would leap to her eyes when she found herself a titled lady with command of almost unlimited means.

Naturally, he took good care that she did not run short of the absolute necessities of life. Little scheming was needed toward that end, since the Irrepressibles never asked whence a five-dollar bill came--they merely whooped at sight of it, and planned Lucullan banquets. The Irish janitor, too, was easily persuaded not to put his threats into execution. But that he was adamant. He had been swindled and humbugged so outrageously in the past that the wife of his choice must come to his arms single-minded and unsciled, sincerely loving him for himself alone.

So it was with a mixture of high resolve and trepidation of heart that he tapped on her door. He was surprised by the sound of the voice that bade him enter. Mary had been crying. She made no effort to restrain her tears even when she saw John.

"Why, girlie, what is the matter?" he said tenderly.

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.

"That is so, Mary," he said softly. "Perhaps you cannot confide in one who is little more than a stranger, but you might find it possible to take your husband into your confidence."

"What are you saying?" she almost screamed, though she trembled violently, and did not seek to extricate herself from his embrace, or cursed, with the artistic temperament, and it is a mere piece of impertinence on your part to even try to understand us."

John's lips set tightly and his fists clenched.

"If I can't convince you by the spoken word," he said sternly, "I'll try another style of argument. You are a man, I suppose, but I tell you straight you have the soul of a dog, and not a well-bred dog at that. Still, the veriest cur will show its teeth when attacked, and now I'm going to lick you into obedience."

Parker was so angry already that he was nothing loath to accept the challenge. He was a well-set-up man and something of an athlete, so the two were fairly well matched.

They fought like a couple of bulls, raising such a racket in the respectable neighborhood which harbored the artist's studio that servants came

"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.

"Tell you what," he said gravely, "I've a sort of notion that Evan Parker isn't playin' the game. Mary has gone to his studio a good deal of late. I think she's posing for that mural picture of his."

"I kind of thought that John Burton was gone on her," said Reggie.

"I wish to the Lord she'd marry him," and Delancey's tone was very emphatic. "He's one of the best, and I do believe Mary would inspire him with ambition. He's just the type of working man who ends up as the head of a trust or something equally high and mighty."

"Where is he now?" inquired Pierce.

Tom crossed the landing and peeped into John's room. "But John was out. As a matter of fact, at that instant he was confronting Mary's tempter and urging the man in the most solemn way to abandon his pursuit of a girl who deserved better treatment at his hands."

Parker's handsome face flushed with anger when he learned the nature of John's errand.

"I shall be obliged to you, my good fellow, if you will mind your own business," he said icily. "People of your class don't grasp these things. Miss Ames is a blessed, or cursed, with the artistic temperament, and it is a mere piece of impertinence on your part to even try to understand us."

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running in dismay. None dared to interfere, whereupon someone sent for the police. It chanced that Brother Billy was actually talking to a roundam 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."

"And what did you say?"

"I refused. I am sick of being poor. I am here to tell you now that I agree to your terms."

She had given no heed to Brother Billy, who had withdrawn to a corner of the studio when she ran in.

"What are those terms?" he said quietly.

"She wheeled on him like an angry goddess.

"What business is that of yours?" she snapped. "Keep your psalm-singing for those who need it. I don't--not yet, anyhow."

"I can guess only too well," replied the saddened evangelist. "But you have chosen wrongly, you deluded girl. You are ready to become the partner of this evil-minded man, who will cast you off when tired of you as a child discards a broken toy. And in the same breath you have refused the honest love of a man who would have made you a marchioness and loaded you down with the wealth for which you have sold yourself, body and soul."

"What are you talking about?" shrieked Mary, almost at her wit's end, fully convinced that the old man had gone mad.

Brother Billy shook his head.

"The John Burton who shared your poverty of late is none other than John Burton, the multimillionaire, marquis of Castleton in the British peerage, and owner of several fine estates," he said. "I have known his secret for some time. Now it is your punishment that you, too, should know it."

So John still found Humanity in the Grip of Evil. (End of Eighth Episode.)

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