

"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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Tenth Episode--Down to the Sea

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

JOHN BURTON—Titled multimillionaire, seeking an answer to the question, "Is Humanity in the Grip of Evil?"
MARJORIE ROGERS—Daughter of Captain Rogers.
CAPTAIN ROGERS—Skipper of one of the boats of the fishing fleet.
RICHARD WEST—Manager of the Emerson Fisheries company.
THOMAS WEST—His son, in love with Marjorie Rogers.
JIM WAIDE—Assistant to Captain Rogers.
OSUKA—Burton's Japanese valet.

Chapter XIX.

An Unpleasant Investigation.

One fine summer's morning that man of unhappy experiences, John Burton, tenth marquis of Castleton, had managed for the time to rid himself of the bugbear which possessed his soul when it was rudely thrust upon him once again by one of the many letters facing him on the breakfast table.

Of late he had taken an active interest in the management of his affairs. It has been seen how his investments in various industrial concerns brought, anything but happiness, though, by some mockery of fate, his already ample means continued to swell by leaps and bounds. He fondly imagined, however, that he would be spared any contingent anxiety when he took shares in a small fishing company established in a town on the New England coast. But it was not by fortune, while giving with one hand, smote relentlessly with the other.

Thus, from a letter written in a crabbed calligraphy, stared an ugly legend. He did not know the writer, but it was clear from the text that this correspondent with a displeasing budget of news must be a skipper of one of the fishing boats operated by the company. It read:

Dear sir: I cannot be aware how you are being swindled by Richard West, manager of the Emerson Fisheries company. It is in my business, but I like to see any man wronged. As you are a director and a large stockholder in the company, I feel sure it will be to your benefit if you visit the place and examine West's accounts. I will not attend to this charge. I will give you every information.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM ROGERS.

John sighed.

It was not quite convenient to leave home that day, because his own valet was away on vacation, and the man's place had been filled temporarily by a Japanese. Above all, he disliked the task set by a well-intentioned informant. But he never shirked a duty. Hastily running through the other letters, and scribbling notes on them for the benefit of his secretary, he ended his breakfast and went out into the hall to warn Osuka of the impending journey.

He was not quite prepared for the spectacle that met his eyes. The little brown man had found a long peacock's feather somewhere, and was skillfully balancing it on the tip of his nose for the edification of a couple of grinning maids. John enjoyed the diversion as much as any, and took care not to interfere until the feather toppled over.

Osuka was overwhelmed with confusion on discovering that his master had witnessed the performance. But John only smiled and told the artist to get ready at once for a journey to the seashore.

"Bring very little baggage," he added. "Just a suit case apiece for yourself and me."

He had never previously visited Emerson, but knew that it was quite a small fishing village, lying well apart from the beaten track of tourists, and probably innocent of anything in the shape of a reputable hotel, though no doubt he would be able to find lodgings.

At any rate, this would-be friend of his, Captain Rogers, could hardly have asked him to come down and look into the company's affairs if no accommodations were obtainable. Therefore, it befell that John and his valet descended on Emerson that same evening, and were lucky enough to discern on an unpretentious but clean-looking cottage a notice stating that rooms were "to let" within.

Osuka was evidently scandalized by the thought that his master, a man of great wealth and a British nobleman—a Japanese naturally attaches more weight to a title than does the democratic American—meant residing in such a poor place, but John reassured him, knowing full well that the people in these remote New England hamlets would provide clean beds and wholesome food. Nor was he mistaken. The interior of the humble dwelling was spick and span and a motherly woman quoted terms, at which the millionaire had difficulty in repressing a smile.

After a meal and a change of garment Burton went out to visit Captain Rogers, whose house was pointed out to him by the landlady. Osuka, of course, had nothing to do, and he, too, strolled into the village, after ascertaining that his master would probably not return for an hour or more.

Of course, the arrival of the two strangers had been noted by many curious eyes. John's distinguished appearance would have attracted attention anywhere, and the fact that he was accompanied by the diminutive but sturdy Japanese, obviously his servant, set scores of tongues wagging.

Indeed, Emerson was minded to be somewhat too attentive to the little man from the Land of the Rising Sun. Some of the inhabitants had already guffawed at him as he followed John through the main street, carrying the two suit cases, and now that he was alone he drew quite a crowd, composed not only of urchins, but of men from whom more sense might have been expected.

One of these, a hulky, brutal looking fellow named Jim Waide, was by the way of being a humorist. There was not really an ounce of wit in the man's composition. His wit was heavy as his huge fist, and sheer fear of him was mainly responsible for the laughter which greeted his ponderous jokes. When, therefore, he came up to the Japanese, grabbed him by the shoulder with one huge paw, and with the other lifted up his hat, "just to see how the little mon-

key's hair fits," the mob shrieked with laughter.

Osuka, really a merry little fellow, affected to treat the incident as comical, grinning widely, snatched his hat from Waide's hand and strode off at a rapid pace.

The scattered houses of the village soon gave way to a bare and rocky headland. The tide was out and a stretch of firm white sand, interspersed with broken reefs, offered an inviting stroll, because every Japanese loves the sea, and the smell of brine is as incense to his nostrils.

Burton, meanwhile, was clothed with Captain Rogers, a rough, plain spoken old seadog, who left him in no doubt whatsoever as to the malpractices described in the letter.

"It's this way, Mr. Burton," he said, punctuating each sentence with thoughtful puffs at his black pipe. "Me and me mates have nothing to complain of. We're paid market rates for what we catch. But the thieves' is done by this yer West when it comes to weighing 'em. Only half of the stuff is credited to the company. The rest goes into his own pocket. It's a sin 'n' a shame. If anybody should benefit by the success of our stockholders it should be we fishermen, but I hate to see any kind of lie bein' carried through so brazenly, an' you losin' money all the time. Now, if you want proof of what I'm sayin', here it is," and he held out a slip of paper containing various dates and weights.

"There you'll find the full amount of the catch made by my own boat in its last fourteen trips. Take that with you, go into West's office 'n' examine his books. You'll see then I'm tellin' you the gospel truth."

"This is a very distressing matter," said John, thoughtfully, "yet you are not a man who would act without reason."

"An' that's a fact, sir," agreed Rogers solemnly. "I wouldn't butt in if I didn't hate shams, an' that's all there is to it."

The speakers were interrupted by a crash of broken crockery. John looked around and saw that a rather pretty girl, whom he took to be the old skipper's daughter, was washing the china used for supper and had allowed a dish to slip through her fingers.

A shrill voice came from some nearby scullery.

"There you go again, Marjorie!" it said. "Wool-gatherin', as usual, I suppose? For goodness sake, leave them pots alone till I have time to attend 'em."

Evidently this was mother. The girl blushed at finding Burton's eyes on her and resumed the washing up process. Again did her father and Burton go into the details of the robbery which the former alleged against the company's manager, and yet another second time did a dish crash to the stone floor.

Then Mrs. Rogers appeared, flaming of face and irate of eye. Marjorie was expelled from the kitchen ignominiously and ordered to go to her room, where she was told, she would be better employed "fixing up gawgaws for that there dance, which her mind must be set on."

Burton was rather taken aback by the girl's appearance, so he interfered now solely with the object of rescuing her from parental displeasure.

"It's a fine evening," he said cheerfully, "and I think I understand all that I need know before taking things up with Mr. West. Perhaps this young lady—she is your daughter, I suppose—will be good enough to come out with me for half an hour and show me my bearings, if that is the correct nautical phrase, Captain Rogers?"

"She's well able to do that," snorted Mrs. Rogers. "She's always ready to gad about instead of stopping to home an' doin' chores."

Marjorie availed herself of even this grudging permission, and quickly had donned a hat of the broad-brimmed variety, with wide silk ribbons which tied under her chin in a coquettish bow. As the two passed through the village street there was much covert speculation concerning John's identity, and a discreet inquiry was made at his lodgings, where his name was forthcoming.

Thus it became known that the capitalist mainly responsible for financing the Emerson Fisheries company was in the village and, in due course, the information reached the ears of the one man deeply interested in it.

That man was Richard West, a bloated, red-faced bull-necked fellow who would have looked more at home blocking the doorway of an East Side saloon than seated in the office of a business concern of the coast. As is often the case, his only son, Thomas, presented a direct physical antithesis to his father, taking, no doubt, after a more comely mother. The younger man was tall, slim and fairly good looking, with a face inclining rather to kindness of disposition than to evil. His chin and forehead were slightly receding, but he owned remarkably frank and pleasant blue eyes, and his mouth was tender and flexible as that of a woman.

Unfortunately, he happened to be the accepted suitor of Marjorie Rogers, though none of the older people was aware of the fact, since the Rogers family was not on good terms with the Wests, and Richard West would have sworn loudly that his son must marry something better than the daughter of one of his own employes.

John and the girl got along well together. Soon she was telling him about her dance arranged for the next evening, and inviting him to attend, which he straightway promised to do.

They had wandered in the direction taken by Osuka, and were greatly diverted by the little man's antics when they came upon him unexpectedly in a small sandy cove. He had taken off his shoes and stockings and rolled up his pants, meaning to wade in an attractive pool. It happened, however, that the place harbored a particularly aggressive type of crab, and he had not been in the water long before his toes were seized in a vise-like grip. When John and Marjorie drew near he was dancing about in frantic contortions, endeavor-

ing to pry open a pair of very tenacious claws. John went to his assistance and helped him to get rid of his assailant.

The incident was wholly unimportant save in one vital respect—Osuka got to know Marjorie, and regarded her as a friend of his master's. That sufficed for the Japanese, who was a most faithful soul, and prepared at any time to risk his life for one whom he served.

Next morning Burton went to the company's offices at what he deemed a suitable hour, and introduced himself to the manager, West, of course, pretending to be vastly surprised, though he had known of John's presence in the village shortly after the latter's arrival.

He was much puzzled and genuinely alarmed, but contrived to mask his feelings by assuming a deferential manner.

"Glad to see you here, Mr. Burton," he said, with a great show of affability. "I think you will find everything in apple-pie order. Have you come down for a few days' fishing? The weather is fine and dandy just now, and you can stay out as long as you like, even though you mayn't be a very good sailor."

"Before I leave I shall probably go out with the fleet," said John. "Mean-

dent's absence from the office his own sure and certain fate.

John passed the next day quietly enough. He came to like Marjorie, and was somewhat shocked by discovering that West's son was enamored of her. He made it his business to meet the young man, and liked him. As a result, he resolved privately that when skillful searchers proved beyond a doubt that the older man had been defrauding the company he would simply be sent about his business after receiving the severest of warnings.

Unhappily, Richard West could not guess this benevolent intent. While Burton was actually planning the happiness of the younger people—since there seemed to be no reason why Thomas West should not step into his father's shoes—the man who found a criminal career so suddenly cut off was making up his mind to save himself by the foulest means it was possible to contrive.

West chose Jim Waide as his tool, Waide was second hand on Rogers' boat, and a drunken, ne'er-do-well fellow who was always borrowing. At that very period he was indebted to West for various small loans, and the latter made no mistake in the assumption that if Waide were tempted by a sufficiently large sum—a sum

which would mean to him a year's untried orgy—he would stop short of no means of earning it.

The weather was fine, so John made the most of an unexpected opportunity and took a long, solitary walk. He promised Marjorie faithfully that he would return in time for the dance. Indeed, he was anxious to attend this festival, since it would give him a close insight into the life of the village and the various types of its inhabitants. He came back some two hours before the appointed time, meaning to enjoy a bath and a good meal at leisure.

He found the village in an uproar. It had been stirred to its very depths by a terrific fight, and the combatants were none other than Jim Waide and Osuka, Burton's Japanese valet.

The facts were simple enough. She struggled to free herself, but he threw his great arms around her shoulders and strove to kiss her. This was all done in a sort of drunken good humor. He pretended that she was only coy and would be willing enough to endure his embraces if it were not broad daylight and people were looking. Marjorie, however, now really alarmed, fought with the desperation of despair and screamed shrilly for help.

Assistance came from a most unexpected quarter. Osuka was among those who ran to the other hand in close race to know the strength of Waide's arm and the brutality of his temper—Osuka dashed at him, much as a fox terrier might tackle a bull.

At the little man's first grip on his wrist Waide released the girl and turned to face his diminutive opponent. He laughed loudly when he saw who had attacked him.

"Why you dirty little monkey," he cried, "I can smash you with one hand tied behind my back."

Among the many things which Jim Waide had never heard of previously, but was now destined to acquire a close and intimate knowledge of, the art of jiu-jitsu bulked large. Within a few seconds he was not quite aware whether he was standing on his head or his heels. Biting little jabs struck him on clusters of nerve centers, paralyzing his limb on which they landed. He crumpled up as though his solid frame were composed of nothing more substantial than melted lard inclosed in sausage skins. He was thrown this way and that, spun several times headlong into the dust and finally pitched into a dock, in which he might straightway have drowned had not a couple of mates gone to his assistance and dragged him out.

"Say, Jim," said one, when Waide was safely landed, "I guess you've had enough, an' more than enough. That little Jap is a regular whirlwind."

"I'll get even with him all right,"



BURTON FINDS A SERIOUS DISCREPANCY IN THE RECORD.

while, I want to go through your books. There is a belief prevalent at headquarters, whether well founded or not, that the local catches run to rather small quantities as compared with those made elsewhere under similar conditions."

West was startled, but strove to hide the fear which suddenly welled up in his heart.

"The books are all O. K., Mr. Burton," he said. "Where do you wish to start? At the beginning of the year? Or would you care to see last year's accounts?"

"For the present," said John, "I shall content myself with examining the records for the last fourteen days. You show the catch made by each boat, I suppose?"

"Why, yes," said West. "I shouldn't be able otherwise to make the right payments. You see, the men are paid on what they bring in. No fish, no money, is the rule of this trade."

He produced certain ledgers, and John ran through the columns until he came to the Mary R., the name of the boat which Captain Rogers operated. He checked the entries with the slip given him by the skipper, and West's red face showed deep purple blotches when he realized what this comparison meant. He knew then that a career of ill-doing was ended once and for all. He saw himself a convicted felon and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.

He needed no telling that he was exceedingly unpopular in the village. Once the fishermen became convinced that the president of the company was on their side they would make no bones whatsoever about giving evidence. Even the poor hirelings whom West bribed to certify false quantities would go against him and plead in extenuation that they were only obeying managerial orders which it was not within their province to question.

Ugly and horrible thoughts clouded the man's brain as he gazed through a mist of foreboding at the judge who had so suddenly fallen upon him from the skies. He could not gather from John's manner the extent of the newcomer's suspicions, but an evil conscience was more than ample in that respect, and West found no cause for relief when Burton rose quietly, pocketed certain memoranda which he had made, and said:

"There appear to be certain matters which must be inquired into thoroughly. I will see you later. Meanwhile, I shall be glad if you will look those books in your safe and hand me the key."

"Is that quite necessary?" gurgled the other.

"I am afraid it is," said John, gravely.

Then, indeed, did West realize the fate in store for him. In that moment, from being a thief in actual fact he became a murderer in intent.

CHAPTER XX.

A Startling Sequel.

After taking careful thought, Burton decided that the investigation should be entrusted to other hands than his own. He wrote to the company's lawyers and requested them to send down a member of the firm and an accountant.

Meanwhile, he did not go near West again, and as events proved, the man must have suffered the tortures of the damned, reading into the presi-

dent's absence from the office his own sure and certain fate.

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older man was not only determined but no alarm should be given, but that this fool boy should be prevented from ruining his own future.

Before the Japanese could determine how to act for the best he heard a door being unlocked, and the younger West rushed out into the sunshine. But a shot crashed from the interior of the building, and Marjorie's lower staggered and crumpled up on the ground.

By this time some people in the village had become aware of unusual happenings in the office of the fishing company, so a score or more heard the report and saw Thomas West fall. They knew, too—a vital important thing—that Osuka was not the assailant, and were ready in consequence to believe the dramatic story he poured out when a number of men hurried forward in response to his excited gesticulations.

The terrible truth soon became manifest. Richard West, maddened by fear and rage, had actually fired at his own son. Perhaps he did not mean to kill the unhappy youth, and only had it in his frenzied mind to frighten him into submission. Be that as it may, the bullet had entered the young man's heart, and the father was with difficulty prevented from adding another crime to the terrible one already laid to his account. He fired more than once at the men who sought to arrest him, but Osuka contrived to trip him up, and he was handcuffed promptly and led away.

But an almost more tragic possibility yet faced the horrified people. Osuka managed to convince them that West had really planned the murder of Burton and Rogers, and those who knew Jim Waide did not hesitate to believe that the presence of Marjorie would hardly deter him from accomplishing a grim and tragic mission. Therefore, hastily securing a rifle or two, they manned a couple of the fastest boats in the fishing fleet and set out after the Mary R.

The tiny craft was now only a dim speck on the horizon, and could not be discerned at all from sea level. The fishermen knew that Rogers would head straight for a bank which at that period of the year was alive with fish, so wasted no time in fruitless search, but took a precise line. They were rewarded within half an hour by seeing the Mary R. at a distance of about two miles.

The little vessel was laid to and looked placid enough, but the trained eyes of experts noted that its gear was not out and deducted some unusual event from that simple fact, so they strained every nerve to get the last ounce of power from the engines, and raced along at a rare speed.

It was well, indeed, that they did so. Jim Waide, whom Marjorie had seen taking furtive drinks from a bottle which the skipper was not looking, had evidently screwed up his courage to act as soon as Rogers decided to anchor. The unfortunate skipper was busy hushing himself with some hooks and lines when the wretched murderer sprang at him and buried a knife between his shoulder blades.

For some reason known only to himself, Waide wasted a precious couple of seconds in tumbling the body into the sea—possibly he wished to avoid blood stains on the deck. At any rate, Marjorie's piercing scream seeing her father thus ruthlessly cut to the death again met his unwilling time to turn and meet his would-be slayer's attack. The two grappled and John contrived to seize Waide's right wrist and thus stay the hand which held that dripping knife.

To and fro they swayed in mortal

struggle. Marjorie did not interfere, but had the presence of mind to stop the engine. At last, making a supreme effort, Burton bent Waide's arm back and forced him to let go the weapon which fell into the sea.

Thinking he had mastered his adversary, Burton relaxed his efforts for a moment, and the outcome was nearly disastrous, since Waide, agile as a cat, sprang away from him, seized a boat-hook and dealt him a terrible blow on the head, which momentarily deprived him of his senses. The great brute laughed at the success of what he regarded a clever stratagem and was about to pick up Burton's body and heave it into the sea after that of the hapless skipper when Marjorie closed with him. Despite her puny strength, the plucky girl managed to defeat his purpose and compelled him to defend himself against her really courageous attack.

The fight between the two had lasted for five long minutes, and it was a sheer impossibility that either they or Marjorie should notice the rescue boats drawing near. When Waide had beaten down the girl's hands, however, and was actually taunting her with the fate he meant inflicting after he had dealt with Burton, his staring eyes fell on the pursuers.

Then he knew what was coming to him. Inspired by the final madness of a cornered tiger, he seized Marjorie, meaning to leap overhead and hold her down together. But she, too, had seen the boats, and she fought now for dear life. The odds were hopelessly against her, of course, and she was on the very lip of death when one of the men in the leading boat took a chance and fired. The bullet struck Waide's spine. He lurched backward, stumbled and dropped into the sea.

So John Burton, on recovering his senses, came back into a world which still shuddered in the Grip of Evil.
END OF TENTH EPISODE.

Restrained Bangs. Marie, supple and slender, and Aunt Clara, bulky and bent, had returned from a shopping expedition, during which each had been trying to buy a ready-made suit. "I got along very well," said Marie, "but Aunt Clara is getting so fat that about all she can get ready-made is an umbrella."

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