

# THE GRIP OF EVIL

by Louis Tracy

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AN ADAPTED FROM THE SERIES OF PHOTOPLAYS OF THE SAME NAME RELEASED BY PATHE

John Burton, a worker in a steel mill, suddenly inherits an English title and £100,000. He decides he will spend his life, if necessary, in an attempt to solve the question "Is humanity in the grip of evil?" Each episode of this series forms a distinct story in itself depicting his experiences in his search for the truth.

## EIGHTH EPISODE

### "In Bohemia"

#### 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 by-gone 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.

Moved by an uncontrollable impulse he sprang to his feet and ran upstairs two steps at a time. His valet was arranging the studs in a dress shirt.

"Quit that," cried 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.

Beyond a plentiful supply of money, John took nothing with him which savored of the dignity he was leaving behind. He meant giving himself a genuine test. He took a 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 subservient 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 sixty-five 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 policeman 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, I'll fix things. This stupid scrap ends here and now. Neither of us will hit Brother Billy—will you, mates?"

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

"Why didn't you tell me 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.



She Made No Effort to Restrain Her Tears.

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 shepherding."

But the offer was not to John's liking. It savored too much of the very inquiry which was torturing his soul, and he knew from sad experience that he had been an abject failure as a philanthropist. The missionary promised to give his case some consideration on the morrow.

Brother Billy rendered his new friend an immediate service by directing him to a lodging slightly superior in quality to any place which Burton might have found otherwise. It had been erected as a studio building, but an industrial wave had submerged the district, and art is a tender flower which seldom thrives in such conditions.

Still, the misses had not wholly departed, as John learned while bargaining with the janitor for a sparsely furnished room. A pretty girl passed on the landing. She was carrying a bottle of milk and a box of crackers, and John was vastly surprised by noting the way in which the man scowled after her.

"I don't mind a chap like you being a few days shy with the rent," came the janitor's prompt explanation. "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 with a jerk of the head 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.

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 as it happened, that a gruff 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 I ain't paid tomorrow—"

"Hush," gurgled a rich, flute-like 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 guide's satirical 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.

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. But the Irishman took the situation and the rum good humoredly, 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.

"Toll 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 on instantly, and John knew that a protesting-but-laughing girl was being dragged feebly downstairs. But the brotherhood of the arts did not end there. He heard the tall young man saying:

"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."

This 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 title better deserved. 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. He was very much taken by the girl.

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 for-

gotten the salt! There isn't as much in the place as would fill a nidge's eye."

"I have some," said Mary. "I'll go and fetch it."

She was gone so long that Delancey grew impatient, and yelled for her at the top of his voice. She came at once, but not alone. She was accompanied by a good-looking, well-dressed man of about thirty-five years of age, whose face and manner betokened the successful artist.

The three young men hailed him gleefully as "Evan," and invited him to join in the impromptu meal. He accepted instantly, and was evidently more than willing to renew memories of his own student days. Mary, whose eyes were sparkling but whose demeanor was now somewhat subdued, calmly introduced the newcomer to John as Mr. Evan Parker, and the surname revealed an artist whose work commanded high prices both from dealers and connoisseurs.

Now, a dramatic thing had happened during Mary Ames' brief absence from her friends, an event destined to shape the whole course of her life. She had gone into her room expecting to find it empty, and was surprised, even a trifle indignant, by discovering that the rich and well-known Evan Parker had actually dared to enter her apartment without permission. He had even stripped the wet cloths of the clay study on which she was engaged. Nor did he turn at the sound of her footsteps, but continued his scrutiny of the clay figure. His attitude was reverent. He seemed to exude a breathless admiration.

"Wonderful!" he murmured softly to himself. "I don'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



John Is Invited to the Spread.

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 you 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 clay, he said quickly:

"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 her eyebrows as the artist gave her a swift and searching glance.

"I hate pretense," he went on quietly. "You are too poor to study under the masters yet, aren't you? Don't I know too well what it means? I don't know too well what it means? Mary a day here I worked in Julien's and sustained exhausted nature on a ten-centimes 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 naiad. 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."

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.

Just then Tom Delancey shouted for the salt. Little wonder if Mary's eyes shone and her mind was distraught.

#### Mary's Decision.

John 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 so-called 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.

Brother Billy's keen brain soon penetrated the young millionaire's disguise. A few tactful inquiries in other quarters, a few well-known 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 protegee's identity.

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 its 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 kind and trusting nature enveloped 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

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.

"I'll put it quite clearly, dear," he cooed. "Will you marry me?"

She recoiled as though he had struck her.

"Oh, no, no," she cried. "Anything but that! It is impossible!"

He knelt by her side and endeavored to soothe her.

"Listen, Mary," he whispered. "I love you, and I begin to hope that I am not altogether indifferent to you. You are a pure and good woman, I know, and I shall be honored beyond measure."

"Stop!" she screamed in a frenzy. "Must I even sacrifice one of my few friends? Marriage between us would be a crime. Our poverty would crush us. Don't you realize what it means? I am ambitious. I love my art, and would sell my very soul for the wherewithal to prosecute it. I want to see the great wide world—the world which I have read about and dreamed of but which seems to be a mere mirage on the ever more distant shore of the morrow of my daily life."

Now, John, in his wooing, had managed to lose sight of the all-important fact that he was supposed to be desperately poor, and Mary's passionate refusal to bear poverty's handicap came as a shock. Yet he was strong minded enough to hold back, even in that tense moment, the expectation that would have cleared the horizon and led the girl's stumbling steps into the firm, sure road of happiness.

"We are both young, Mary," John urged. "I have every confidence of being able soon to place you in a far better position than we both occupy at this time. Don't send me away from you, because I am only a workman."

He was astounded by the hard and defiant glitter which shone suddenly in those beautiful eyes. The melting blue in their depths turned to the cold sheen of steel. She plucked a note from her breast.

"Read that!" she said, almost harshly. "There you will find the problem confronting me. God help me, I have to choose between honest love of a poor man and the temptation of a wealthy one!"

Hardly grasping the true sense of the words, John opened the crumpled letter. It was signed "Evan," and bore that day's date. A glance at its concluding passage sufficed.

"I must go ahead, to Paris. Will you go with me? Think of the opportunity you will have for study. And don't you see just a little for me? I am happy. I don't offer you marriage. That as you know, is out of the question to present day. I want you to weigh this proposition fairly and reasonably, and will wait for my answer this evening."

A dawning horror showed in John's face. He had met Evan Parker before, and deemed him a decent sort of fellow. Yet the man had the callousness to admit an infamy over his very signature. Mary's tortured soul bared itself in a wild cry.

"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.

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 served the girl to make up her mind, once and for all. She could endure the struggle no longer. Scrubbing 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 room 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 light-heartedness, was the shrewdest of the trio.

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

At that instant John 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 coldly. "People of your class don't grasp these things. Miss Ames and I are blessed, 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."



"I Don't Know What I Shall Say When He Comes."

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 but 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 running in dismay. None dared to interfere, whereupon someone sent for the police. It chanced that Brother Billy was actually talking to a roundsman 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 simply to eject the intruder from his house.

"I 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 features. 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 round 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 wits' end, yet 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.)