

# THE GRIP OF EVIL

LOUIS TRACY  
 COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY LOUIS TRACY

## THIRTEENTH EPISODE

John Burton, a worker in a steel mill, suddenly inherits an English title and \$10,000,000. He decides he will spend his life, if necessary, in an attempt to solve the question of 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.

### Circumstantial Evidence.

No one who knew Grace Coe could doubt that she was really and truly in earnest, so it was all the more singular that her father, though not misjudging her character, should be a confirmed skeptic as to the success of her philanthropic schemes. Perhaps the caution necessary in handling and safeguarding large sums of money belonging to other people tends to weaken a banker's faith in human nature.

Nor was the girl helped by the actions of her brother, George, whose folly, even more than his willful extravagance, plagued his father sorely. The Spirit of Evil usually carries a full quiver, and more than one vicious shaft lacerated Mr. Henry Coe's skin on the unhappy day which commenced inauspiciously when he was visited by his son soon after the bank opened its doors.

The young man entered his father's private room with a cheerful personal inquiry which fell altogether short of its object.

"Well, dad," he cried, affecting an air of boisterous good-humor, "I hope you're feeling fine and dandy this morning? You ought to. Stocks seem to be going strong."

"How much?" inquired the banker dryly.

He suspected the motive of this unusual solicitude for his well-being.

However, seeing there was no help for it, George tackled the situation with some show of bravado.

"If you put it that way, dad," he said jauntily, "I may as well up and at once. I'm in a bit of a hole this time, and want quite a stack. If only you will see me clear today I'll promise—"

"I shall never again trust any promise of yours!" broke in his father. "You need not trouble to give me details!" he went on, seeing that George was nervously fingering a thick pile of accounts. "I have made up my mind how to treat you in the future. You will receive a monthly allowance. Since you are under no living expenses while you remain under my roof, and are worse than useless in this office, I have decided to pay you \$500 a month to clear out of the business. This sum is more than sufficient to enable you to mix in the society which I approve of. It will be credited to your account on the first of each month. Today, as a final concession, I will stake you with a month's allowance in advance."

No! Protests are of no avail, and if you look so sulky I warn you that the payments may be reduced by one-half.

Young Coe was flabbergasted, but had the sense to realize that his father was talking in deadly earnest, for the time being, at any rate.

That same morning Grace Coe was trying to persuade Burton that humanity was not in the Grip of Evil—never had been—and never would be. Her fine eyes lit with enthusiasm as she spoke, and the tenth marquis of Castleton—despite some years of disillusionment—found it hard to resist the girl's pleading.

In view of subsequent events, it should be conceded to both that they had not the slightest reason to suspect the campaign of vengeance inaugurated by the "Hell-cats." The police believed that that criminal organization had been thoroughly disrupted by the raid. It was true that neither its leader—a wretched hag known as "Mother Flannigan," nor its most noted member, "Two-Gun Jake," had been captured. But the gang was broken up and its members scattered. Mother Flannigan's whereabouts were not even known, and Jake's accustomed haunts were no longer enlivened by his swaggering presence.

The authorities were woefully mistaken, however. The "Hell-cats" were not minded to take defeat so easily, and their murderous plans, though foiled once, were soon renewed.

Grace Coe was hardly to blame if she was blind to the shadow of impending disaster.

"I am sure you are mistaken, Mr. Burton," she said sweetly. "You must learn to think right. Implicit trust in mankind is the first onward step along the road to Redemption."

"You must not imagine that no progress is made in the work of regeneration merely because you have met with failures on the way," she urged, laying an impulsive hand on his arm. "Time and again have I been saddened by relapses among my own people in the settlement. Yet you would be surprised if you realized what patient faith can accomplish. Those who have stumbled have come back again."

"Look at Bill Reilly's case! And Blanche Griffin's! The man was a darling burglar, yet he resisted temptation when his former associates could have extracted a fortune from you. And picture what it means to the girl to abandon forever the glare and glitter of the night clubs."

"Come with me, Mr. Burton. I will submit two of my waifs to a severe test. It may be cruel, but if they survive it they will benefit, while your cynicism will sustain a heavy shock."

John protested that he was by no means cynical, but Grace laughingly held to her purpose. She unlocked a drawer in the desk at which she was sitting, and took out a roll of currency notes. She counted the money, which amounted to quite a large sum. Then, halving it, she placed one-half on the desk and pocketed the remainder.

Crooking a finger at John, she led him into the outer hall, where Bill Reilly and Blanche happened to be seated at the moment.

"Mr. Burton and I are going out," she said to her proteges. "We shall be away a couple of hours, or longer. If you two have nothing better to do, you might take care of the office until I return."

Blanche and her companion rose at once. In such a matter Miss Coe's request was practically equivalent to a command.

"Where are we going?" inquired John, when Grace and he were out of earshot.

"For a spin in your car," she answered gayly. "But is it wise to leave so much money on your table? There must have been nearly two thousand dollars in the pile. Is it even fair to tempt those people in that way?"

"If I am wrong," came the earnest answer, "I shall suffer the loss with resignation, and you will be strongly entrenched in the position of the superior male who can say 'I told you so.' Meanwhile, let us forget these problems for at least forty miles."

John fell in with her mood. How might any young

man do otherwise? They enjoyed the run amazingly, and by some miracle contrived to talk lightly of that great world which both had seen through such very different spectacles. They were absent a good deal longer than the two hours stipulated for, but, when they came back, found Bill Reilly and Blanche Griffin seated in the office. Each was apparently absorbed in a book, and the pile of bills lay untouched on the table.

Grace chatted with her humble friends for some time before she affected to discover the money with astonishment.

"How careless of me to leave those notes on the table!" she cried. "Why, if you two hadn't been here, someone might have crept in and walked off with the lot!"

John, of course, gave her all the credit she demanded, but, in his heart of hearts, he knew full well that Evil was still rampant. Not without good cause was it written that "many are called, but few are chosen."

It was peculiar, almost an unfortunate coincidence that the girl's artless maneuver should have succeeded in the very hour when the forces of mischief were gathering within a short half-mile of the settlement building. "Mother" Flannigan and her chief henchman were even then perfecting a plot which would place Burton in greater peril than he had ever before encountered during his adventurous life, while George Coe was unconsciously assisting in its development.

The young man had gone straight from his father's office to the flat in which he had installed Virginia Griffin, Blanche's sister. This girl was primarily responsible for his financial embarrassment. She was somewhat prettier and younger than Blanche, and her demands for money, jewelry, clothing, and all the varied fripperies of a fashionable existence were quite merciless in their frequency and extent. Moreover, she did not possess the saving quality of a genuine affection for the man whom she was helping to ruin. In her own phrase, George Coe was a "dub."

At the instant his familiar ring was heard on the electric bell she was describing him to Two-Gun Jake as "that poor boob who has gone to try and skin a few more notes off his father's wad."

"Huh!" she cried, when the two were startled by the sound of the bell. "Here he comes now! He mustn't find you on the mat, Jake!"

"Don't care if he does," growled the gangster. "If

that sister of his keeps on reformin' the crowd, there'll be none of us left soon. First Bill has gone, then Blanche. You'll be the next, I suppose?"

"Sometimes you get me that mad, Jake, I want to shake you!" muttered the girl, seizing him and thrusting him forcibly into a closet, which she locked. Then she ran to the door and opened it.

George Coe, however, was not quite such a fool as Blanche deemed him. He noticed instantly that there were two liquor glasses on the table.

"Hello!" he said, glancing around suspiciously; "who's your friend? Is he here with you now?"

"Oh! chuck that jealousy stuff," cried Blanche. "I'm fed up with it. I'm too worried this morning to argue. Have you brought the money?—that's the only thing I want to hear about."

"Guess that's so," came the sullen comment. "You don't care a cent for me."

"But I do, George, really," she protested, flinging her arms around him in mock abandon. "You know I do. All the same, bills have got to be paid, and I can't find money growing on trees."

"Neither can I," muttered Coe, extricating himself from her embrace none too graciously. "The old man has turned rusty at last. Goin' to allow me five hundred a month. What do you know about that?"

"What do I know about it, indeed?" shrilled the girl. "Five hundred! And if I don't pay up five thousand before the end of the week those devils at the stores an' the garage will clean out every stick in the place an' sell the car. Now just listen to me, George Coe. No matter what happens afterward, you've got to find this little lot right away."

"I tell you I can't do it," said George doggedly. "My father won't give it to me, and no one will lend me a dime, and I can't even steal it, because I am turned out of the bank."

Virginia began railing at him through a storm of tears. She would soon have been in hysterics, but an unforeseen diversion came from Jake, who unceremoniously burst the trail lock of the closet and bounced into the room.

George Coe, who was no coward, would have tackled him then and there, but the gunman leveled a wicked-looking automatic pistol at his breast.

"You stand just where you are, Mr. Coe," scowled Jake, "or I'll drill a hole through you. When you've got your breath back, an' your heart stops jumpin', pick up that telephone an' tell your sister to bring the money here. She's got it, and you've got to have it, and so have we, and that's all there is to it."

George Coe's normally red face grew sallow. He was well aware of Jake's bad reputation, and evi-

dently on the verge of collapse, appeared only to recoil immediately when she saw so many unexpected visitors.

"Oh, for God's sake," she whimpered, "don't make a fuss, or send for the police! Mr. Coe has shot Two-Gun Jake!"

The men rushed in, followed by the others, and the first sight that met their eyes was the gunman lying on his back on the floor, while George Coe, wild-eyed and excited, was bending over him. The young man still flourished an automatic pistol in his right hand, and Bill Reilly, inured to such scenes of violence, fancied he meant administering the coup de grace to his fallen adversary. Without further ado, therefore, he caught Coe's wrist and took the weapon from him.

But the victor in the struggle did not resist at all. His fingers were absolutely nerveless, and his whole body shook as though he had been stricken by a palsy.

"Don't you make any mistake about this affair, you folk," he said, speaking with a passionate vehemence that carried conviction. "This fellow held me up. He forced me to 'phone you, Grace. Blackmail or murder—that's what he was after. Played me for a poor sucker, too, who couldn't do a thing. But I fooled him. Taking a chance, I closed with him and tried to get the pistol away. It went off accidentally. I swear to God it wasn't my fault!"

Burton, who had missed no word of Coe's heated explanation, had meanwhile lifted the injured man to a couch and was searching for the wound. He quickly determined that the missile was still lodged in the man's body, and every indication pointed to the reasonable hypothesis that it had probably struck and fractured the shoulderblade. If that were so, Jake was in no immediate danger and a skilled surgeon would soon perform a satisfactory operation.

The chance, however, that an overt scandal might be avoided was dispelled by the appearance of a policeman, over whose shoulder peered the anxious faces of many other residents in the block of apartments. The sharp snarl of the automatic had reached many ears and the affair had now passed into the hands of the law. A second policeman arrived quick on the heels of his brother officer, and the two promptly took charge of those whom they found in the room, barring out gapers behind the locked and bolted door.

"Now, what's all this about?" demanded the senior of the two officers, eyeing the mixed group and the injured man in a comprehensive glance which told

very plainly that he would tolerate no nonsense. George Coe was breaking into a stammering speech, when Virginia Griffin essayed an explanation in his stead.

"There was a row," she wept. "Nobody meant any real mischief. It was just—"

Bill Reilly thrust her aside almost roughly. "What's the use of tryin' to humbug a cop who knows his business?" he said, with a species of grim humor which was grewsome in face of this tragedy. "Jake an' me settled an old score. I grabbed his gun, an' he shot him. He drew on me first, but I was a bit quicker'n him at the game. That's all there is to it."

The three women were literally spellbound by this amazing statement, but Burton, who had seen a good deal of Reilly during the preceding fortnight, and had come to like the man, realized that some solid and well-conceived purpose lay behind that plausible lie. Therefore, he did not interfere, and even restrained George Coe, who, after the first moment of stupefied astonishment shown of the shooting, the police, of course, took the situation literally.

"Which of you people were present while the fight was on?" inquired the senior patrolman, producing a notebook.

"Is it necessary that our statements should be taken down now?" demanded Burton.

"You can please yourself," said the policeman. "If you don't choose to clear the air by telling the facts, we'll hold the lot of you. There's such a thing in law, you know, as being an accessory before the fact."

A welcome break was supplied by the coming of an ambulance and a police surgeon.

"This fellow is only blooded a little," he said, curtly.

Burton and Coe, with Grace, were soon accompanying Bill Reilly to the station house, where he was promptly liberated on bail, and Blanche Griffin was left with her nearly distracted sister.

Blanche tried to comfort Virginia, but the latter sought solace in whisky. Blanche resolved to remain with her and when opportunity offered emptied the whisky bottle in the sink. Virginia, deprived of the stimulant, wandered restlessly about her apartment. She was afraid to go out, as she feared the police might arrest her as a witness of the shooting affray.

Mr. Henry Coe was probably surprised during dinner by the hangdog demeanor of his son and the somewhat subdued attitude of a distinctly self-willed daughter.

The storm broke next morning at the breakfast table, when his furious glance dwelt on the scare-heads of a newspaper article describing the shooting affray.

BILL REILLY, REFORMED CONVICT, CONFESSES TO SHOOTING GANGSTER—GRACE COE AND JOHN BURTON GO ON HIS BAIL.



1—Virginia at First Sneered at Her Sister.  
 2—Burton Had His Hand on the Doorknob.  
 3—"I Closed With Him and Tried to Get the Pistol Away."  
 4—A Note of Terror Crept Into Her Voice.

Did Mr. Coe mention the number of the apartment?

"Yes—thirty-four," said Grace.

"Why, that is where my sister lives!" quavered the other.

"Your sister?" broke in Reilly, and there was that in his voice which drew a critical look from Burton.

"Look here, miss," went on the ex-convict, gravely. "It's an unpleasant thing, and I'm sorry for Blanche, but you've got to know the facts before you stir out of this house. Your own brother has rented and furnished that apartment for Virginia Griffin, and she is in with the Hell-cats hand and glove."

"But he spoke to me himself," wailed the girl frantically. "Surely I know my brother's voice? And I am certain he is hurt. The way he spoke convinces me of that."

Then Burton took the lead in his masterful way. "Of course you must go," he said; "but there is no reason on earth why we should not accompany you."

Olive street lay in the immediate neighborhood, and the swift automobile brought them thither in a couple of minutes. Blanche knew that her sister's apartment was on the third floor.

She sped swiftly up the stairs and herself rang the electric bell. Without waiting for the door to be opened she rapped loudly on the panel.

A pistol shot barked from the interior. The ominous report might almost have been an answer to her summons. Burton and Reilly now stepped in front of the two women and the former again knocked loudly. Burton had his hand on the doorknob and his shoulder against the stout frame, meaning to force the lock, when the door opened in his face and Virginia Griffin, pallid and tear-stained, and evi-

dently on the verge of collapse, appeared only to recoil immediately when she saw so many unexpected visitors.

"Oh, for God's sake," she whimpered, "don't make a fuss, or send for the police! Mr. Coe has shot Two-Gun Jake!"

The men rushed in, followed by the others, and the first sight that met their eyes was the gunman lying on his back on the floor, while George Coe, wild-eyed and excited, was bending over him. The young man still flourished an automatic pistol in his right hand, and Bill Reilly, inured to such scenes of violence, fancied he meant administering the coup de grace to his fallen adversary. Without further ado, therefore, he caught Coe's wrist and took the weapon from him.

But the victor in the struggle did not resist at all. His fingers were absolutely nerveless, and his whole body shook as though he had been stricken by a palsy.

"Don't you make any mistake about this affair, you folk," he said, speaking with a passionate vehemence that carried conviction. "This fellow held me up. He forced me to 'phone you, Grace. Blackmail or murder—that's what he was after. Played me for a poor sucker, too, who couldn't do a thing. But I fooled him. Taking a chance, I closed with him and tried to get the pistol away. It went off accidentally. I swear to God it wasn't my fault!"

Burton, who had missed no word of Coe's heated explanation, had meanwhile lifted the injured man to a couch and was searching for the wound. He quickly determined that the missile was still lodged in the man's body, and every indication pointed to the reasonable hypothesis that it had probably struck and fractured the shoulderblade. If that were so, Jake was in no immediate danger and a skilled surgeon would soon perform a satisfactory operation.

The chance, however, that an overt scandal might be avoided was dispelled by the appearance of a policeman, over whose shoulder peered the anxious faces of many other residents in the block of apartments. The sharp snarl of the automatic had reached many ears and the affair had now passed into the hands of the law. A second policeman arrived quick on the heels of his brother officer, and the two promptly took charge of those whom they found in the room, barring out gapers behind the locked and bolted door.

"Now, what's all this about?" demanded the senior of the two officers, eyeing the mixed group and the injured man in a comprehensive glance which told

very plainly that he would tolerate no nonsense. George Coe was breaking into a stammering speech, when Virginia Griffin essayed an explanation in his stead.

"There was a row," she wept. "Nobody meant any real mischief. It was just—"

Bill Reilly thrust her aside almost roughly. "What's the use of tryin' to humbug a cop who knows his business?" he said, with a species of grim humor which was grewsome in face of this tragedy. "Jake an' me settled an old score. I grabbed his gun, an' he shot him. He drew on me first, but I was a bit quicker'n him at the game. That's all there is to it."

The three women were literally spellbound by this amazing statement, but Burton, who had seen a good deal of Reilly during the preceding fortnight, and had come to like the man, realized that some solid and well-conceived purpose lay behind that plausible lie. Therefore, he did not interfere, and even restrained George Coe, who, after the first moment of stupefied astonishment shown of the shooting, the police, of course, took the situation literally.

"Which of you people were present while the fight was on?" inquired the senior patrolman, producing a notebook.

"Is it necessary that our statements should be taken down now?" demanded Burton.

"You can please yourself," said the policeman. "If you don't choose to clear the air by telling the facts, we'll hold the lot of you. There's such a thing in law, you know, as being an accessory before the fact."

A welcome break was supplied by the coming of an ambulance and a police surgeon.

"This fellow is only blooded a little," he said, curtly.

Burton and Coe, with Grace, were soon accompanying Bill Reilly to the station house, where he was promptly liberated on bail, and Blanche Griffin was left with her nearly distracted sister.

Blanche tried to comfort Virginia, but the latter sought solace in whisky. Blanche resolved to remain with her and when opportunity offered emptied the whisky bottle in the sink. Virginia, deprived of the stimulant, wandered restlessly about her apartment. She was afraid to go out, as she feared the police might arrest her as a witness of the shooting affray.

Mr. Henry Coe was probably surprised during dinner by the hangdog demeanor of his son and the somewhat subdued attitude of a distinctly self-willed daughter.

The storm broke next morning at the breakfast table, when his furious glance dwelt on the scare-heads of a newspaper article describing the shooting affray.

BILL REILLY, REFORMED CONVICT, CONFESSES TO SHOOTING GANGSTER—GRACE COE AND JOHN BURTON GO ON HIS BAIL.

These sensational captions were more than borne out by the text of the article. Coe's voice was thick with fury when he sought his daughter.

"You are becoming a disgrace to your family," he cried, profanely, snatching a clenched fist into the newspaper crumpled up in the other hand. "This sort of thing has to stop, and stop now."

The man was incoherent with wrath, or he would never have sworn in front of a daughter whom he loved devotedly. He could not guess, of course, how acutely the girl's soul was harrowed by conflicting emotions. For once she was tongue-tied, and tried lamely to argue that if she would be consistent in her endeavor to elevate humanity she must help those who depended on her.

Naturally, the irate man would not listen. He insisted on complete and instant submission to his will, and Grace was at her wits' end to obtain some sort of respite, since it was impossible that she could accede to his wishes on an utterly false pretext. At that juncture her brother entered.

"This thing has gone far enough, sis," George said firmly. "It's up to me to face the music. I did that shooting, dad. I was several sorts of a fool, and now I am ready to pay the price. But one thing you ought to know and believe before I say another word. I'm a soft-headed idiot and a wastrel, but I am no criminal."

Disregarding Grace's tearful protests, he surprised even the angry banker by the quiet lucidity with which he exposed the trap laid for him by Virginia Griffin and Two-Gun Jake. He did not spare himself in the least degree. He did not so much as strive to palliate his action in consenting to wring the money out of his philanthropic sister.

When he had made an end, his father raged at him so frenziedly that he turned and left the room, taking literally the command that he should "clear out forever and never again dare to show his face in that house or city."

But the infuriated banker counted without his daughter.

"Father," she said quietly, "is George entirely at fault? Did you bring him up in the right way? Have you taught him to trust his fellowmen and revere womanhood? Has not every word and counsel of yours warned him that humanity was prone to evil? Can you blame him now if he believes you and acts on the very principles you inculcated?"

Henry Coe could not have been more surprised if one of his own office boys had ventured to lecture him as to the investment of his money, and pointed out the inherent rottenness of certain great corporations which bulk large in the financial world. At any rate, he calmed down sufficiently that he was willing to listen. After a few minutes he even condescended to send a servant after his son with a message that he was to come back and await the banker's return after office hours.

The next morning when Blanche Griffin was leaving her sister to go to the settlement house, which was under the charge of Grace Coe, Virginia confessed to her some of the plans of the Hell-cats.

"They got it in for Burton, and they have made a plan to kidnap him and either take their vengeance on him or hold him for ransom," said Virginia.

Blanche, surprised at this information, lost no time in rushing to the settlement house. She wished to warn Grace Coe, because she thought Grace was interested in John Burton, but not finding her there, imparted her information to Bill Reilly, who was waiting the arrival of Miss Coe.

Reilly was surprised and decided that the best way he could serve Burton was to again join the gang and find out their detailed plans, so that with this information he might frustrate them.

He went to a saloon in which he was certain to find some members of the Hell-cats. A distorted version of the row in Virginia's apartment had already reached the gang and its members were not indisposed to believe the story which Reilly put forward, namely, that he was bearing the brunt of the fray to save Jake from prosecution for levying blackmail and attempted murder. Incidentally, he tried to make his one-time companions drunk, and affected to become more drunk than they.

"You see, boys," he confided to them, "though Jake may be kept in the hospital, we can still get that rich guy Burton, and also I've been laying my lines to get my hooks on Grace Coe's wealth. Take it from me they both got the dough, and if we can't get Grace Coe we certainly can get Burton."

"It's all right, Bill," leered one of the Hell-cats; "while you and Jake were having that rough house we fixed a plan to get Burton."

"Don't talk rot," snarled Reilly; "the guy was along too."

"I don't mean that," hiccupped the other; "it's a scheme I'm talking about. Old Mother Flannigan has got a plan whereby we can get him and we'll let you in on it. Will you come with us?"

"Will a duck swim?" growled Bill.

Reilly and the Hell-cat members started for gang headquarters.

In the meantime Burton had been to the settlement house and, not having seen Grace, decided to go there again. As he was returning in his automobile he saw Reilly in the midst of the Hell-cats. Holding humanity was in the grip of evil and being unduly suspicious, Burton decided to see what the gang was planning. Finding an opportunity he left the machine and stepped into a doorway, where he was out of sight of the members of the gang. As fate would have it, as they were passing the doorway, they met another one of the Hell-cats, who greeted Reilly, and Reilly in drunken friendliness explained that his reform was all for the purpose of finding means to get Grace Coe's wealth.

Burton, sorrowing at Reilly's downfall, and not wishing to tell Grace of her misplaced confidence in the man, returned to his home.

Reilly, as soon as he learned the plans of the Hell-cats, which were to go in a body to Buxton's house that night and kidnap him, left the other members of the gang, telling them he would show up at the appointed meeting place and go with them. As soon as it was safe he sneaked into a telephone booth and, calling up police headquarters, warned them to guard Burton's house that night, as the Hell-cats planned to capture the titled multimillionaire and hold him for ransom.

That night, when the Hell-cats sought to enter Burton's estate they found a strong guard of police in the grounds and, deeming discretion the better part of valor, retreated as rapidly as they could and scattered in all directions.

Burton, seated in his library dreaming of Grace Coe, realized what a supreme disappointment it would be to her to know that her supposedly reformed assistant had relapsed into his former criminal ways and that all his reform was a sham, decided that humanity is in the Grip of Evil.

(END OF THIRTEENTH EPISODE.)