

# THE GRIP OF EVIL

LOUIS TRACY  
COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY LOUIS TRACY

## SEVENTH 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 "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.

### The Butterflies

#### Caught in the Storm.

A summer hotel in Lakeland—one of those sylvan retreats in which men and women endeavor to lay aside for a while the everyday burdens of life—is too often a microcosm of the great outer world. John Burton, tenth marquis of Castleton, had never even heard of the Lakeside hotel, and would have been very much surprised if told that certain tragic issues of grave import to himself were taking shape there at the very time he was vainly seeking rest and oblivion on a country farm.

Yet, so strangely interwoven are the warp and weft of human existence, a number of men and women were even then all unconsciously contriving one of those tangled snares of deceit and misery into which this unhappy young millionaire so often blundered. In order to understand certain incidents which befell at a date long before Burton met any of the people concerned, it is necessary to set forth the main characters somewhat in the style of a play.

Thus, we have: Beatrice Tournour, a pretty, vivacious and sympathetic girl in her eighteenth year.

Arthur Hardwicke, aged thirty, a New York lawyer who has already won repute in his profession. He has brought his wife, an incurable invalid, to the Lakeside hotel in the hope that mountain air may prove beneficial.

Dr. Albert Merriam, a physician in attendance on Mrs. Hardwicke, a man of unscrupulous character, who stops short of no mean device to attain his ends.

Marion Miller, a handsome adventuress, who, if the fates were kind, should have found her affinity in the doctor, but who was, unfortunately, enamored of Hardwicke.

Of course, there were others in the cast—mere shadows flitting across the stage so far as Burton was concerned, but he little dreamed how closely his fortunes were destined to be bound up with the four persons described above.

The curtain might be said to have lifted on the tragedy on a certain afternoon when Beatrice Tournour came in from the tennis court, gayly swinging her racket, and found Hardwicke leaning over the rail of the veranda. Near him was a recumbent form, covered with a light wrap, whom the girl realized must be his invalid wife.

Beatrice's laughing expression changed to one of pity. She came up the steps of the porch, and was evidently on the point of uttering some kindly inquiry when the man put a finger on his lips. With a wan smile he indicated that his wife was asleep. She nodded, and sped away on tiptoe, turning at the end of the veranda to wave a hand as though conveying the message:

"You know I am sorry for you. Give poor Mrs. Hardwicke my love when she wakes!"

Oddly enough that simple gesture of the girl's was fatal. Since her eyes were bent on the young lawyer, she did not notice that another woman was on the point of coming out through the swing-doors against which at that instant Beatrice pressed an impetuous elbow. As a consequence, there was a collision.

The girl apologized quite nicely, but Miss Miller, a lady with whom she was acquainted merely by name, grew brick-red with anger, and asked her why she did not look where she was going.

Beatrice was astonished and hurt. Nevertheless, she again found some words of regret and went to her room wondering vaguely how anybody could be "such a cat."

Were she more experienced in the ways of the world she would have understood the real cause of Marion Miller's annoyance. Beatrice was young, sylphlike, and unobscurely attractive. Marion was already a full-blown rose whose petals were in danger of dropping, and Arthur Hardwicke, in the brief half-hours he allowed himself from an unflagging attendance on his doomed wife, had shown a marked partiality for the society of that lively chatterbox, Beatrice Tournour. What more need be said? Marion hated the girl and would have welcomed anything which removed from her path a rival whom she deemed all the more dangerous because of the artlessness of her rivalry.

But Beatrice was just as much a daughter of Eve as the other woman. The very next time she saw Hardwicke and Miss Miller chatting on the lawn of the hotel she did not scruple to signal the man with an inviting glance as she passed, with the certain result that he quitted Marion abruptly, being only too glad of Beatrice's companionship.

The incident was seen by many eyes, and correctly interpreted by at least one of the residents in the hotel. Doctor Merriam, concealing a cynical smile behind a cloud of cigarette smoke, gave the angry woman a little time to recover her self-control before he strolled up.

"Good-day," he said cheerfully. "Charming weather we're having, aren't we?"

"Oh, quite!" came the curt answer.

Miss Miller did not like Doctor Merriam, and was in no mood to conceal her feelings at that moment. "Sad thing about Mrs. Hardwicke," he persisted, "and the position is particularly hard for her husband, who is really a delightful fellow and worthy of a better fate."

The woman wheeled around on him as though his words had aroused her interest.

"Is Mrs. Hardwicke very ill, then?" she asked.

"Ill isn't the word. She's fated. In a week or two Hardwicke will be absolutely compelled to send her to a sanatorium, where she will linger for a few months, until death sends a merciful release."

"Are you sure?" demanded Marion fiercely.

"Why otherwise should I tell you such a thing?" said the doctor slowly. "Now look here, Miss Miller, it is part of my business to keep my eyes open. You help me in this matter and I'll help you."

A sordid plot was entered into that afternoon, and its development was not long delayed. Doctor Merriam's prophecy was borne out within a week by the stricken Mrs. Hardwicke, because her mental condition became so bad that it was impossible to keep her in the hotel. The doctor persuaded Arthur Hardwicke to leave all the arrangements in his hands and remain quietly at Lakeside, regaining his own vitality, while his wife was taken care of by others.

The distressed man agreed. As a consequence he

found the society of Beatrice Tournour more and more congenial, and Doctor Merriam had to bend his wits to the task of persuading Marion Miller that she must keep within bounds.

In this world it too often happens that the way of evil is made easy by circumstances. One day, when Hardwicke was somewhat recovered from the shock of the knowledge that his wife's death under most distressing conditions could be only a matter of a month or two, he met Beatrice by the side of the lake. In the distance, some four miles away, a large island loomed through the haze. It was a rocky place, little wooded, and providing no pasturage, so no one lived there.

But it offered excellent facilities for fishing, and the hotel had built a hut, with rough provision—in the shape of stored food, bunks and materials for a fire—for parties who might wish to spend the night.

Somehow, the chance conjunction of a charming girl, a boat, and an objective in the hard physical exercise of rowing to and from the island, appealed to Hardwicke.

The weather was fine when they started. They were so engrossed in each other's conversation that they paid little heed to a bank of heavy black clouds gathering over the distant hills. A summer storm came up swiftly and broke in fury when the boat was about half a mile from the island. The comparatively shallow waters of the lake were soon lashed into a turbulent and dangerous state, and it needed all of Hardwicke's skill and every ounce of his strength to keep the tiny craft from being swamped.

When they were yet fully a hundred yards from the shore one of the oars broke, and the girl screamed pitifully. Hardwicke appealed to her to remain calm, assuring her that he would soon place her in safety. He contrived, as best he might, to paddle with the remaining oar, and would have reached a small sandy cove without any further difficulty had not the boat been caught in a current and crashed against a rock. It was stove in, and filled instantly.

But the man was a first-rate swimmer, and the girl, realizing that she must now fight for her life, did not hamper him. Moreover, she herself could swim fairly well, so, by good fortune, they avoided the rest of the reef on which their boat was wrecked, and ultimately waded ashore.

That most unwelcome visitor affected to consult his watch.

"Since nine o'clock last night," he said, coolly. "I was fishing on the island and got caught by the storm—like yourselves."

"Why did you not let us know of your presence?" he growled.

"Why should I?" smirked the doctor. "I knew you were here, of course. I found your hat and the lady's handkerchief, with her initials."

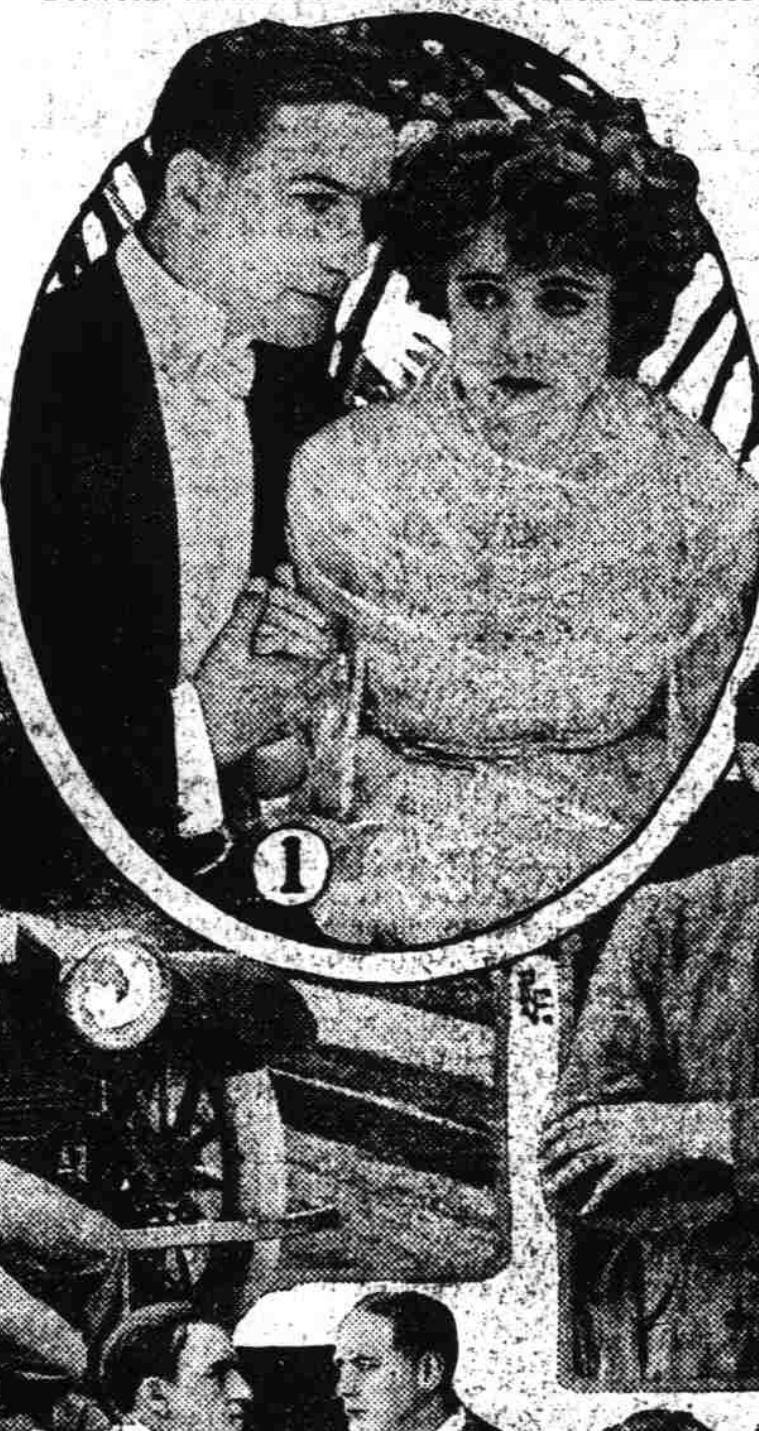
The other man was now nearly beside himself with rage and anxiety, being miserably conscious that Beatrice was drooping like a wilted flower. But Doctor Merriam affected a fine disregard of the man's anger and the woman's distress alike.

"Why should any of us say, or even think, disagreeable things?" he cried, with a pleasant, off-handed air of dismissing the affair. "An accident is an accident, but it is my business as a surgeon to repair such mishaps. You and I, Mr. Hardwicke, can surely be regarded as a suitable escort for a young lady benighted on an island. We passed the night here together. What more is there to be said? What more can anyone say, even an evil-tongued woman? I assure you, on my honor, you two people can rely absolutely on my discretion."

So the unhappy pair left it at that, and met with some measure of consolation when Merriam's suave words explained matters to Mr. and Mrs. Tournour, who, with other guests in the hotel, formed an excited group at the landing place to receive the castaways from the boat sent to their assistance.

### Crushed.

Between exhaustion and mental stress Beatrice



1—Burton Tell Beatrice the Old Story.  
2—Beatrice Had Recognized the Dying Man.  
3—"I Want Money, and You Two Must Purchase My Silence!"  
4—"How Long Have You Been Here?" He Demanded Shakily.

The rain pelted down in torrents, but this drawback did not matter except that it added to their discomfort. Beatrice was exhausted, of course, but profoundly thankful that her life had been spared, and very much inclined to regard Hardwicke as a hero, owing to the coolness he had displayed in a real crisis.

Supporting her tenderly, he led her to a point from which he guessed that the hut would be visible. Sure enough, they soon reached the cabin. It was stoutly built, and quite storm-proof.

"I am most worried about my father and mother," she confided to him. "They will surely think I am drowned!"

"Oh, no," he reassured her, confidently. "The boatman knows we were bound for the island. When the gale sprang up he would give the alarm, so that more than one telescope must have seen that we were quite near the beach, while it is more than probable that the actual accident to the boat will not be observed. The only real trouble is that we shall have to remain here all night."

"Oh, why?" she whispered in sudden terror. "Because misfortunes never come singly. The hotel launch is out of order, and no small boat can live among those waves. We must calmly and sensibly make up our minds to remain here and put up with the inconveniences until the wind dies down, which is sure to happen during the night."

For a time the girl was silent and distraught, but the natural vitality of youth asserted itself and she began to make light of their troubles. Hunting in a cupboard, she found some biscuits and tinned meat, and on these they made a hearty and much-needed meal. Then, feeling tired, and as night was drawing on, Beatrice said that she would try and sleep, so as to be ready for the rescuers who must surely come with the dawn.

Half an hour passed and Hardwicke was feeling drowsy himself, when an electric flash which seemed to sustain its piercing brilliance for a second or more was followed by a thunderclap so close overhead that Beatrice shrieked in dismay.

Thinking the hut had been struck, with direful consequence to the girl, Hardwicke rushed in, bent over the bunk in which she was lying, and clasped her in his arms. To calm her he remained within the hut.

In the morning, waking to blue skies and sunlit calm, they came out to look for the relief party which must now be on its way. And there, seated before the embers of the fire, sat Doctor Merriam! Hardwicke endeavored to look stern, though falling lamentably to control his voice.

"How long have you been here?" he demanded shakily.

The doctor sprang up at once.

"Are you, too, going to be a fool?" he snarled.

Hardwicke understood. At last the scales had fallen from his eyes, and he could peer into the man's filthy soul.

"Go!" he said, pointing to the door.

Merriam was minded to be defiant, but something in Hardwicke's expression forced him to obey. So, with an evil sneer, he picked up his medicine case and went out. Without a spoken word to Beatrice, her avowed lover followed.

He overtook Merriam in the corridor and pointed silently in the direction of the doctor's own room. Not caring to raise a scene just then, Merriam nodded and strode on ahead. He would have closed the door of his bedroom in Hardwicke's face, but the latter clearly intended to force an entrance, and the doctor yielded. Then Hardwicke turned the key in the lock, took off his coat, and, almost without any preliminary, the two men engaged in a fierce fight.

They were fairly equally matched in physique, but sheer resolution and fiery wrath gave Hardwicke the victory, and he did not leave his opponent until the man was beaten to the ground.

Going then to his own room, Hardwicke changed his clothes and removed the most noticeable marks of the contest. Feeling himself unequal to meeting Beatrice again that afternoon, he left the hotel, meaning to walk along an unfrequented path, and successfully dodging Marion Miller, who, during the past few days, had lived in a veritable inferno of her own creation.

She looked after him with an expression of baleful hatred, since hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and encountered Doctor Merriam while in this harpy's mood. He, like Hardwicke, was by no means anxious to meet any other resident in the hotel, but the sight of Miss Miller suggested a ready means of revenge. Ignoring a stare of surprise at his battered appearance, he drew Marion aside and forthwith poured into her eager ear the full story of the night's doings on the island.

Three months later Mrs. Hardwicke died and her husband and Beatrice Tournour had already come to their senses. They had met often, both in the hotel and at the girl's home, and the knowledge was slowly forced on them that they were unsuited,

both in character and disposition, to the lifelong tie of matrimony.

Moreover, another ideal had crept into the girl's troubled heart. She had met John Burton, and, struggle as she might against the obsession, became only too well aware that he was the only man she could ever love.

Then Hardwicke and Beatrice were together one day, chatting merely as friends, when Doctor Albert Merriam was announced. Merriam laid bare the object of his visit without the least pretense of concealment.

"I am poor," he said. "You, Hardwicke, are rich, and pretty Miss Beatrice, if rumor speaks aright, is about to marry a millionaire. I want money, and you two must purchase my silence."

"How much, you cad?" demanded Hardwicke.

"I'll take what you've got in your pocket at this moment," was the truculent answer. "But don't think I'm all through on payment of a few hundred dollars. I want ten thousand from you, Hardwicke, and you, my lady magnificence, will have to pay up twice that amount when you're wed. I shan't be hard on either of you in the matter of installments. But this money I must and will have, and I am prepared to take your word that it will be forthcoming."

What was to be done? Just nothing. Hardwicke gave the wretch a couple of hundred dollars and promised him the balance of the first half of ten thousand within a month. Then Merriam left them, leaving truculently as he departed.

Unhappy creatures! They were in an ignoble position, yet the man was ready to sacrifice even a much larger sum than ten thousand dollars to save the girl from the consequences of an indiscretion, while Beatrice herself would have bartered her very soul in order to wed John Burton.

Fate, having dealt so harshly with her, seemed ready to be kind when next she met the marquis of Castleton. They were guests at the house of a natural friend. After dinner, when a large party of young people were tempted forth onto a spacious lawn by a perfect moonlight night, some lively young mix suggested a game of hide and seek.

The proposal was hailed gleefully, and soon the whole happy party, men and women, boys and girls, were eager to scatter among the surrounding shrubbery. The organizer of the frolic formed her friends in line and began to "count out." To the accompaniment of much laughter and jesting comment, John became "it."

Beatrice chose the corner of a summer house as a retreat, but forgot to tuck in the hem of a light silken dress, which John's keen eye soon detected. She ran as he came near her, but he was too fleet of foot, and soon held her in his arms.

Though he laughed and called out "Caught," he seemed in no hurry to let go his charming prize. They were in a shaded walk at the moment and no other was near. John was conscious of the girl's heaving breast and glistening eyes. The fragrance of her hair was intoxicating. He felt the rigidity

of her supple frame, tense in the effort to escape, suddenly yielding beneath his ardent grasp.

In effect, they behaved exactly as lovers do all over the world in similar circumstances; and, before either was well aware of what was happening, their lips met. Thrilled with a realization of a new happiness, they drew slightly apart, and the girl hung her head. But John promptly took charge of the situation, and led her to a neighboring seat, where he lost no time in asking her to marry him, and, almost to his surprise, found that a woman's heart was his wholly and irrevocably.

And, indeed, all might have gone well with these two were it not for Doctor Merriam. John, it is true, would have lived in the bliss of ignorance, and Beatrice would carry one sad secret to the grave, but still they might have had their share of happiness, and the unlucky young marquis would certainly have been drawn away from the strange quest which fortune seemed to have imposed on him.

But his release came not yet. On the very day that the engagement of the young couple was announced, Merriam and the woman, who had become his confederate, met to plot further evil.

Obedient to a telephone summons, Arthur Hardwicke came to the blackmailer's house.

"You know, I suppose," said the doctor, "that your little lady of the island is about to marry this fellow who calls himself John Burton, but is really, I understand, a British marquis?"

"That does not concern me now," said Hardwicke stiffly.

"Pardon me. You are mistaken. Miss Tournour is about to wed a very rich man, and the assessments will have to be slightly increased!"

The hot blood rushed to Hardwicke's face, and he would have closed with his tormentor in a struggle which might well have ended fatally for one of the two, had not the doctor leaped suddenly behind a desk from which he grabbed some typed manuscript.

"Look here!" he cried fiercely. "Read this before you make a confounded fool of yourself a second time! I have written the whole story there, and copies are placed with my lawyers, and in a safe deposit vault. In the event of my death or even disablement, and in the absence of further orders, my bankers have instructions to send copies to every newspaper in the city. Moreover, the most noble marquis of Castleton will receive one also."

Hardwicke was beaten, and knew it. He was wrung with sorrow not alone for himself, but for the unhappy girl, into whose life he had unwittingly brought so much tragedy. Muttering hoarsely that he was unable to discuss matters that day, but would see Merriam by appointment next morning, he rushed out of the house.

That very evening Burton took his fiancée for a long drive into the country. They were detained somewhat later than they had counted on, so the chauffeur increased the speed for the homeward journey. As a consequence, perhaps, he took risks he might have avoided otherwise. The fact remains, at any rate, that at a street corner he ran down and fatally injured a well-dressed man.

Burton alighted instantly and helped to extricate the unfortunate pedestrian, from under the heavy car. Happening to glance at Beatrice when the light from a street lamp fell full on her face as she leaned out to ask what had happened, he saw a look of terror there which seemed to him to be only the natural emotion of a woman shocked by a ghastly accident.

But it was more than that. Beatrice had recognized the dying man. Her eyes had gazed into his. It was Doctor Albert Merriam.

The accident happened at a somewhat late hour, and was not bruited about the city until the following morning. Burton, who had retired to rest very late, after many hours of anxiety due to Merriam's unfortunate death, was somewhat late for breakfast. He had just opened an important-looking letter, carrying the superscription of a local bank, when Arthur Hardwicke rushed in, followed by a scandalized butler who had failed completely to stop the entry of an impetuous visitor.

"For heaven's sake, forgive me, Mr. Burton!" cried the agitated Hardwicke. "I am behaving like a crazy man this morning, but the one sure thing in my mind is that you ought not to read what is in that letter until you have heard my story first."

John would be more than human if he were not puzzled and suspicious, because some hint of an earlier attachment between Beatrice and Hardwicke had already reached his ears. Nevertheless, he agreed to listen, and, with a mighty effort Hardwicke contrived to pour out a broken confession of his first wrongdoing, and the excessive price, in suffering and treasure, which had already been exacted of him.

"Now you know the truth, Mr. Burton," he said. "My life is of no consequence, but in your country rests the whole career and happiness of a woman who, despite her solitary transgression, is essentially high-souled and noble-minded above the common. I am not seeking to make you her judge. I am here to ask you, as man to man, not to strike at me through her!"

John sat for a few minutes gazing into space.

"What is in that paper, then?" he said, indicating the letter Hardwicke held in nervous fingers.

"Oh, that is Merriam's story," was the despondent answer. "That was the threat he held over me. In case of his death or accident, and if I had not bought back the manuscript, it was to be sent not only to you but to the editor of every newspaper in the district."

Burton leaped to his feet.

"Good God, man!" he almost screamed, "while you and I are wasting time here, this horrible screed may already have been published. You go at once to Miss Tournour and tell her that the worst is now over. I'll rush to every newspaper office in the city and stop publication of Merriam's tale, no matter what the cost. Bid that poor girl be of good cheer. She has suffered much, and is, therefore, due much happiness!"

The two men separated hastily. Burton would not trust to the telephone, but began a round of the newspaper offices.

There was in that city, as in every other, an evening journal specially noted for sensational news. Marion Miller arrived at its publishing office an hour before Burton reached the editor's ear.

So the drab story of human folly was blazoned far and wide, and while John was yet pleading for its suppression, Beatrice Tournour and Arthur Hardwicke were dead, the one by poison, the other by a bullet.

And that was the beginning and the end of John Burton's second love story. The butterflies lay crushed in the mud.

(END OF SEVENTH EPISODE)