

Perils of Thunder Mountain

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NOVELIZED FROM VITAGRAPH PHOTO PLAY

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EPISODE SIX

SYNOPSIS.

John Davis and Hawk Morgan, executors of the estate of John Carr, miner, disagree over the disposition of the profits of the mine. Morgan, seeking the gold and the girl for himself, and unsuspected by Davis, whom Ethel really loves, makes several attempts on the life of the latter, assisted by an accomplice named Spider Bellas. Suspicion is diverted to a mysterious hermit, Davis, Hawk and the Spider leave for San Francisco to get machinery to work the mine. Hawk and Spider drug Davis and leave him in an abandoned cabin in imminent danger of a terrible death.

John Davis, having rescued his mortal but unsuspected enemy, Hawk Morgan, from the vultures and a living death, and having hauled him to safety, tripped and went over the cliff himself. Hanging to the end of the frayed rope and fighting his way foot by foot back to the edge of the brink, he might have regained it despite his terrible handicap had not the Spider coming up and seeing his desperate plight, ground the frayed section of the lariar beneath his heel. And at that dastardly act the rope parted and John went shooting downward to the rocks below.

That he would have been crushed to death upon them there is no doubt had not great good fortune come to his rescue. Some distance in his fall, John's body crashed into a tree that thrust itself out at a sharp angle from the face of the cliff, and the resilient branches of the pine, first bending beneath the shock, a moment later responded with a counter movement that tossed the body aside as a powerful wrestler does the form of a weaker antagonist. John, landing upon a narrow ledge that protruded from the main wall of rock, lay there as insensate as the stones themselves, one arm dangling over space. It so happened that this ledge, lying as it did on an incurve of the cliff, was not visible to one who stood upon the upper brink of the main descent.

Spider Bellas, having done this damnable thing and for the moment disregarding the body of his comrade, threw himself upon his stomach and peered over the edge. Far below him he could see a small avalanche of stones and dust going down in gigantic leaps, but nothing more. Feeling certain that the body of his foe was in the midst of that roaring mass and even now was beaten out of all semblance of humanity, he watched the avalanche grow in size each moment until with a faint crash it was lost in the pines far below which bordered the Sweetwater river or creek.

He arose satisfied that he no longer had to fear Davis in the game they were playing and turned his attention to his senseless friend. Dragging him a little farther from the edge he drew a flask from his pocket and poured a small quantity of liquor down the other's throat. Revived by the stimulant, Morgan sat up. He placed his hands to his cheek, winced from the pain of it and drew his palm away covered with blood.

"My God!" he cried with a shudder. "I remember now. The vultures! What happened?"

Bellas, wiping the blood away from his still terrified pal's face, was debating the words which should form his answer.

"Davis shot a couple of them and then hauled you up."

"Where is he now?"

"He was bending over you and between you and the edge. The ledge broke and he fell. He caught the rope somewhere as he was going down, but it was frayed out and—well, look for yourself." He picked up the broken fragment and held it before the other's eyes. "It broke and he went to his death in the valley. I think his body must have plunged into the river and been swept away." Solemnly Morgan turned upon him.

"Spider, did you push him over that edge?" The spider crossed his heart. "I did not, Hawk."

"And did you cut that rope?" The other raised his right hand on high. "So help me God I never laid hand on it. I was back yonder among the trees when he slipped, and when I arrived here he already had gone over."

"I'm glad you had no hand in it," muttered the Hawk as he arose. "Let's be going back." Pausing but long enough to permit the Spider to roughly bandage his wounds, Morgan led the way to the cabin.

With an exclamation of dismay at sight of his wretched appearance, Ethel came hurrying forward to meet him, Bridget Wegan close at her heels. Rainface was dispatched for hot water and medicaments, and Ethel rolling up her sleeves began ministering to the wounded one.

"Tell me all about it," she demanded as her deft fingers flew on. The Hawk answered in a weak voice.

"Naturally deeply hurt that you folks suspected me of not playing fair, I wandered off alone. The Hermit, who for some reason unknown to me has been doing all this mischief, attacked me when I was not looking. I was stricken down from behind, and when I came to my senses I found myself bound hand and foot and hanging over

a cliff. Then the vultures—he gave a real shudder of horror at the thought—"attacked me. God. It was terrible. I must have fainted again, for I remember nothing until I saw Spider's honest face bending over me."

"And you did what?" cried the girl as she turned upon Bellas. The Spider took up the tale.

"Mr. Davis shot the vultures from across the valley. Then he ran to the top of the cliff with me following at some distance. I saw him haul Mr. Morgan up, then just before I got to him he stumbled or slipped and went over the edge. And that's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me."

Horror distorting her face, the girl sat staring at the speaker.

"And his body?"

"I didn't see his body, Miss Ethel, after that. Mebby it is at the bottom of the valley, and mebby it was swept away by the stream."

Slowly the old Indian turned upon the Spider. His roughly hewn face was as impassive as though it had been carved from living rock, but a baleful glow was deep in his black eyes. With slow gutturals he addressed the Spider.

"I believe dam lie."

With a leap Bellas was upon his feet, but quick as he was the ancient one was quicker. Before the leveled gun that the other had whipped from somewhere, the hands of the Spider rose ceilingward, and slowly he began backing away from the glaring one who covered him. From behind them arose the angry voice of Bridget.

"Good for ye, Injun. Yer brains are workin' right wast more."

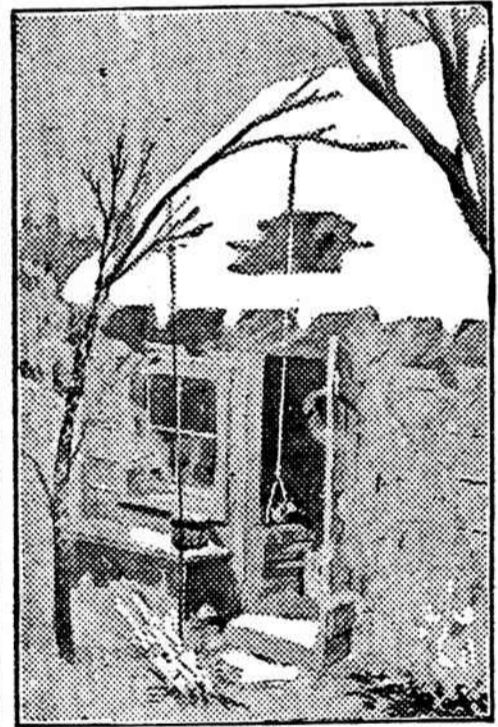
Removing the pistols from the Spider and Morgan, Rainface pointed to the door of Bridget's room.

"Go in there and stay there," he commanded them. He turned to the others. "Me go and find out what happened."

"Curse you—" broke from the Spider, but Morgan cut him short.

"Let him go," he sneered. "We will wait here until he finds out that we have told the truth."

Without further protest they entered the room of the Irish woman, while that lady vanishing in the kitchen reappeared a moment later with a murderous double-barreled shotgun, the tubes of which had been sawed off



Never Before Had John Been in Such Peril of His Life.

short before the chambers. Drawing up a chair she planted herself before the door, great determination resting upon her round face.

"I'll guard the spalpeens," she announced grimly.

"Big Irish squaw some good sometime," grunted Rainface as he went without.

On the narrow ledge on which he lay John first stirred slightly, then opened his eyes and sat up. Having rested his head in his hands for a few moments in order to collect his thoughts, he arose and went creeping along the ledge. Finally coming to a niche that seemed to be of some depth, and with no other way of escape visible, he began crowding himself into it. Some yards farther on he could tell by his sense of feeling that he had entered a room of rock, and lighting a match glanced about. Above him, glowing dully in the flickering light, yet plain to be seen against the matrix of dark rock which composed the rock of the cave, he saw veins of free gold of undeniable richness.

"Great heavens! The mine! At last!"

Striking another match he again cast his eyes about. Upon a small boulder in a corner stood a discolored and battered lantern, and lighting it he followed the vein, until of a sudden it "peered out." Continuing his way, a moment later he bent and picked up a dully glittering object and held it close beside the lantern. It was an ingot such as had filled the caskets, and he thrust it into his pocket.

"Poor old Morgan. I did him an injustice in thinking he stole the gold," he muttered.

He held the lantern on high that its light might carry farther. Before him he saw a rude ladder leading upward,

and mounting it stood within a narrow tunnel. With no other course to pursue he began carefully treading its length, pausing not until he came to its end. Here he found another short ladder above which was a trapdoor, and climbing it cautiously shoved the trap and stepped into a small, dark room. Seeing a door upon one side he silently opened it, his heart giving a great leap at what he saw.

He was peering into Ethel's bedroom, and the girl, sitting before a little table with her cheeks in her hands, was gazing at his own picture. Battered and dirty he sat his lantern down, and approaching her quietly from behind, laid his hand upon her shoulder. Turning swiftly she looked up—gray white—then with a low cry threw herself into his arms.

For several minutes, oblivious that in all the world there existed others than themselves, they abandoned themselves to the caresses and whispers which lovers know so well; then John, holding her off at arm's length, smiled.

"Come. We must go and tell the others also." With Ethel clinging to his arm they entered the room where Bridget sat on guard as formidable as old Cerberus himself before the gates of Hades. Dropping her weapon on the floor the woman arose, mouth open and eyes bulging at the sight of the man.

"Merciful heavens! An' ye were not kilt at all, at all!" she gasped as she stumbled forward to greet him.

"Hardly, Bridget," he grinned. She turned to the pair within the room.

"Come out, both of ye." Heads erect and wearing the look of men grossly mistreated, the Hawk and Bellas entered the living room. John thrust forth his hand.

"I can only ask your forgiveness, boys. Ethel has told me all, and it happened just as you said it did, Bellas. Furthermore, I have found the real mine. Come on, all of you, and we'll inspect it."

"I'll stick behind and see that all goes well here. You can tell me about it when you come back," said Morgan. As he determinedly refused to accompany them, they hurriedly made ready and took their departure.

Left alone, Morgan began to prowl. "Davis must have got in by some secret way," he muttered as he began searching the floor. Presently coming to the closet of the girl's room he raised his rug and at once saw the trap cut in its floor. Quickly securing his Winchester he also thrust his pistol into his belt, raised the trap and went feeling his way down the ladder.

Lighting his way by the lantern which Davis had left behind, he followed the tunnel until it emptied him into the main cave. Above him he saw the gold glowing dully, and gasped as the other man had done as comprehension of its great richness gradually forced itself upon him.

"There are millions here, and I mean to have all. And the girl as well," he muttered. Setting the lantern down he approached the growth which screened the outside entrance to the room, peering into the open air. In the distance he saw the party from the cabin coming up the trail in single file, John in the lead, and he picked up his rifle with a cruel smile.

"Now I have him," he whispered as he ran his eye along the barrel. The roar of his rifle went resounding among the hills, buffeting back and forth like a shuttlecock. John, in the act of leaping across a small rift, plunged forward just as Ethel was about to grasp his proffered hand.

Morgan, in the act of turning to flee, felt a crushing blow from behind, and throwing up his hands, collapsed with a groan upon the floor.

Davis scrambled to his feet and pointed to the moss-covered rock from which he had slipped at the instant the gun was discharged.

"That was the luckiest misstep I ever made, for otherwise that bullet would have gone through my head," he cried as the others came rushing to the spot. He waved his hand at them. "Take to cover everybody—quick."

From the boulders behind which they scuttled they watched the entrance closely for several minutes. No sounds came from within the cave, and convinced that whoever had fired the shot had fled, Davis rushed the opening, gun in hand, the others hot upon his heels. Before them and lying senseless upon the floor was the body of the Hawk.

Ten minutes later Morgan was able to speak in faint tones.

"After you left I stepped into Miss Ethel's room, and much to my astonishment saw a trap door in the floor of her closet. Wondering what it could mean, I descended through it, following a tunnel which led me into this room. As I entered I saw that cursed Hermit in the very act of firing upon you as you approached, and made a jump for him. But in my weak state he was too much for me and knocked me senseless. But thank God you are all safe." Warmly John shook his band.

"We are quits now, old man."

"I knew you would come to believe in me at last," returned the Hawk as he responded to the other's grip.

Together they inspected the cave with its untold wealth, marveling over its richness; scarce able to believe their senses. At last becoming conscious that the day was rapidly fleeting, they agreed that Rainface should take Bridget back to the cabin by means of the tunnel, while Davis showed the others the way he had found into the mine through the narrow cleft. At the entrance to it, however, Morgan, saying that he was too badly done up to go farther, sat down to await their return; whereupon the Spider also decided to remain behind. Left to themselves, Ethel and John pursued their way.

Scarcely were the lovers out of sight than the Hawk, with a grin of triumph at his follower, pointed to a small box which was half covered by debris in one corner and upon the end of which was the brand that signified that its contents was galat powder.

"They overlooked that little package, which must have been left here by old Carr when he was working the mine," chuckled. Dragging it hurriedly to the opening of the niche they attached the fuse. Then lighting it, they scuttled from the place as rats desert a sinking ship.

Davis, chancing to glance back along the narrow passage, saw the crawling light of the fuse. Instantly scenting danger, he picked the girl up bodily, swinging her out upon the edge into the open air, threw himself after her in such haste that he fell headlong at her feet. As he did so, a blast of gas and flame came roaring from the crevice like the discharge from a giant cannon, streaming far out over the edge of the cliff and spewing in its wake a volley of rocks that fell crashing into the treetops far below. They had escaped being blown to eternity by a veritable, belching volcano by the mere matter of a second and a yard.

Waiting only long enough for the narrow passage to free itself of the poisonous fumes, Davis and the girl ventured back. The entrance to the cave was hopelessly blocked. Helplessly they stood staring at each other.

"We're in a sweet fix," mused the man as returning to the narrow ledge they looked into the swimming depths below. "Here we are marooned half way between earth and heaven, with walls above and below us that it would take a lizard to climb. It looks like it was going to be a long time between meals." A little cry from the girl interrupted him.

"See!" she exclaimed, pointing down.

The man's glance followed her pointing finger. Some few yards below them, reposing where it had caught on a slight obstruction upon the face of the wall, was the rope which had supported him before he fell upon this ledge by reason of the Spider's cowardly grinding of the frayed strands apart. Could the lariar be obtained they might well hope to descend from cleft to cleft, but with it lying a dozen feet below their reach it seemed that it might as well have reposed at the bottom of the valley. The girl's quick wit came to their rescue.

"Perhaps we can manage it," she laughed as she sat down and began removing the lacings of her high boots. Quickly grasping her thoughts, John added the buckskin thongs which, ran through his own footgear to hers, and plucking a batpin from her head, fashioned it into a hook. Throwing himself prone he lowered his line, finding to his joy that it was of sufficient length. Not much later he hoisted the lariar in triumph.

Looping one end about her body, he began lowering her to the ledge next below, and she having safely landed there, freed herself while he made the upper end fast. Then sliding down he released the upper end with a deft flip, repeating the operation from time to time until at last they reached a footing upon which they could proceed without further use of the life-saving line. Hurrying homeward with all speed they entered the house together.

Briefly relating their experience while the listeners sat in amazement, Morgan struck his open palm with his clenched fist.

"That—Hermit again. After you and Miss Ethel left us, Bellas and I rested for a moment and then came back here by the tunnel. We did not meet him on the way, therefore there must be still another entrance to the tunnel as yet unknown to us." Davis, acquiescing, changed the subject.

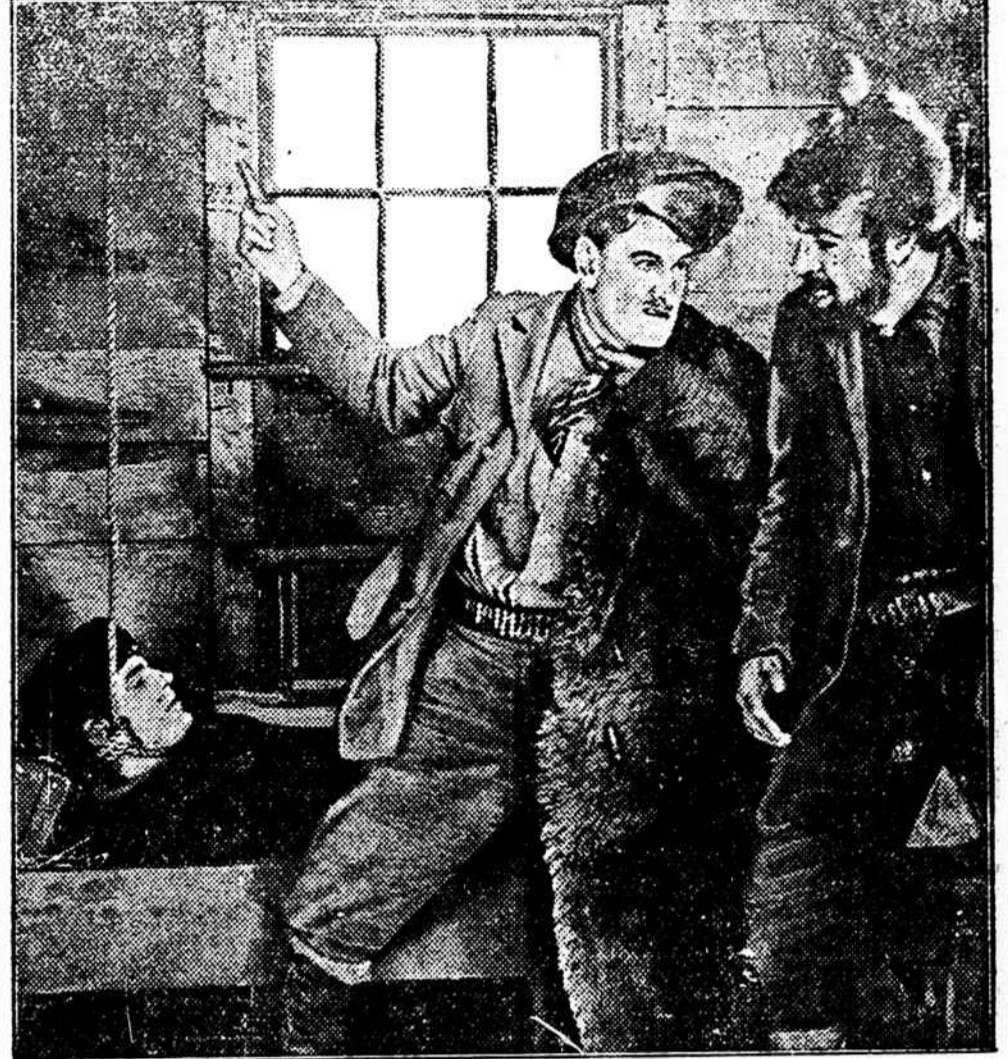
"Now that we have found the mine we must go to San Francisco for men, machinery and supplies in order to start work upon it at once," said he. Morgan at once assented.

"Right. We've a good half day before us and I am feeling much stronger. Suppose we start at once."

"But me?" protested Ethel. John's hand stole over her own.

"We are going to make a flying trip. There is no need of your going through the inconvenience of the journey, and you will be much more comfortable here with Bridget and Rainface." Still unconvinced but yielding to his wishes she silently assented.

Approaching night found the three still upon the trail. Drawing in his horse the Spider spoke.



Fastened the Noose to His Neck.

"We will never get to the station before dark. There is an old shack up here that I know of, and I vote we spend the night there and hit the trail again at daylight. It's bad goin' along this way after dark."

"Where is the shack?" asked Davis, half convinced that the other was speaking wisely. The Spider pointed indefinitely to one side.

"I think it's in there. You fellows wait here till I go and make sure. I'll be back in a few minutes." Easing themselves in the saddles and rolling cigarettes the remaining two settled themselves down to wait.

Once out of sight the Spider slipped from the saddle. Chosing a favorable spot he drew an extra revolver from inside his shirt and lashing it in the fork of a tree carefully sighted it down the trail. Then stringing a small vine across the path tied it to the trigger, after which he returned to the waiting pair with the information that the shack lay in that direction. At once all three started along the way, Davis in the lead.

Reaching the point where the spring gush was set, the two following rascals softly drew their horses to one side. All unconscious of the Spider's treachery, John rode on, his thoughts on Ethel and the mine. From the brush beside the way came a sharp explosion, and his horse falling upon its knees, rolled over upon its side with a bullet through the brain. Half dazed by the fall, John sat up just in time to see the Spider dismount and go rushing through the trees, firing as he ran at some imaginary foe. Soon he returned, gathering up the evidence of his futile attempt as he came.

"Don't know for sure who he was, as I couldn't get a good sight of him, but it looks to me as though that cursed Hermit is still camping on our trail," he explained.

"He won't follow us any farther on this trip," said Morgan. Taking the dazed John upon his horse they rode to the cabin and retired for the night.

In the middle of the night Morgan and Bellas silently lifted their heads. A moment's listening told them that Davis was sleeping soundly, and at a whisper from the Hawk the Spider sneaked to the stove and brought him the coffee pot, which, retaining for a moment, the other handed back.

Just before dawn the Spider awakened Davis, also shaking Morgan.

"Time to be stirring," he announced and sleepily they got upon their feet. Pouring the coffee which he already had heated, into their tin cups, Bellas

tendered each of his companions one. John, drinking his and thinking of Ethel, did not observe that the other men had secretly poured their portions through a crack in the floor.

For a couple of minutes after he had finished the draught Davis sat upon the side of his bunk while the others spoke briefly of the coming events of the day as secretly they watched him. Moment by moment his head sank lower upon his chest, until with a long sigh he fell backward upon the blankets, instantly beginning to snore. The rascally pair arose.

"He'll be dead to the world for a couple of hours after that doping," laughed the Hawk, as the twain began gathering the three lariats together.

"And that will give us time enough to cook his goose for all time." Passing out of the shack they approached a good sized sapling which stood close to the wall.

At the Hawk's direction the Spider climbed the tree and fastened one end of the stout lariats to it, after which he threw the other end of the rope across the ridge pole of the shack, so that it fell down and trailed upon the far side. To the free end Morgan now attached a second lasso, after which he went to an old well from which he

brought a wheel and bucket. By means of an ax and spikes found within the building he made the wheel secure to a second trunk, reaving the lariar through the wheel, and thus obtaining the leverage of a one-sheaved pulley.

By means of this contrivance and their combined strength they sprung the sapling down until it became a mighty bow, capable of hurling a horse through the air. Then blocking the pulley so that it could not run loose, by means of the third lariar they fastened the tree firmly in its bent position. Next going within the shack they securely bound the drugged victim to the stationary bunk, and fastening the noose of the first lariar to his neck, left him there as they made haste to take the last step necessary to the completion of their fiendish plan.

Gathering a few handfuls of dry leaves and bark, they scattered them about the lariar that held the tree in its bent position, after which they sprinkled a quantity of loose powder over the mass. Lighting the inflammable material at its outer edge and waiting but long enough to make sure that the blaze would spread quickly, they threw themselves upon their horses and went galloping off into the gray light of morning, cursing the senseless one they had left behind as they rode. Nor ever before had John Davis been in such mortal peril of a terrible death. For when the oncoming fire should reach the rope which restrained the sprung tree, released from its fetter, would leap to its upright position with gigantic strength, tearing the man apart as in days of old victims were rended limb from limb by wild horses.

At almost the same moment that Morgan was preparing the drugged coffee in the dead hour of midnight Ethel Carr suddenly awakened from her sleep. Unaccountably restless from some cause and unable to again resume her slumbers, she lighted her lamp and picking up a copy of Aesop's Fables from the table read until she came to the tale of the man who found an adder perishing from the cold, and having warmed it at his bosom was stung to death by it as his reward. Warned by some subtle presentiment that John's life was in danger, she hurriedly ran to Bridget's room.

"I have an awful feeling that something terrible is happening to John," she cried. "We must go and learn what it is." In an instant the good Irish woman was fairly flying into her clothes.

"I'll get the Injun while ye dress. He'll be more use to ye than I could be." Off she rushed to summon Rainface, while the girl dressed with frantic haste.

Side by side she and the old Indian went thundering along the trail of the three men. Just as the first blush of dawn came over the mountain tops, Rainface, with a pull upon his bit, brought his horse back upon its hocks. As Ethel followed suit her companion pointed at the ground.

"See tracks here where they turn off. Old shack up that way and mebby we find them there." Again spurring their horses forward they dashed on, a moment later coming to the carcass of the dead animal which had been ridden by John at the time of the exploding of the spring gun.

"Bad medicine," grunted Rainface. "Better hurry heap fast." With a silent prayer arising from her lips that they might be in time, the girl once more tightened her reins and leaned forward in the saddle.

Already the fire had reached the lariar that bound the death-dealing sapling down. Another minute more and John Davis would be torn apart and half his body thrown afar among the rocks for the vultures and wolves.

(END OF SIXTH EPISODE.)