

Perils of Thunder Mountain

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NOVELIZED FROM VITAGRAPH PHOTO PLAY EPISODE 7.

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, makes several attempts on the life of the latter, assisted by an accomplice named Spider. Bellas, suspicion is diverted to a mysterious hermit. Miraculously escaping the latest attempt on his life, Davis, in company with the others, accidentally discovers Carr's hoard of gold. They remove the gold to the cabin, but in the night it is taken away by the hermit. Morgan, feeling that suspicion is beginning to fall upon him, takes an attempt on his own life. They find Carr's mine.

The Hawk and the Spider had galloped off, leaving Davis in a fiendish trap of their own invention. While he was lying drugged in the shack they had bent a sapling down and secured it in this position by means of a rope. Then taking another lasso they had fastened it to the tip of the sapling, running the other end through an unboarded piece in the roof of the shack and fastening the noose about his neck. Having completed this nefarious work, they built a fire close to the rope which bound the sapling to its bent position, knowing that as soon as the flames reached the rope they would eat it in two, whereupon the tree would spring erect with terrific force, tearing the man apart after the manner of one of the fiendish contrivances of the Inquisition. This done they beat a hasty retreat, leaving their victim to his fate.

Ethel Davis, awakened from her sleep in the home cabin at midnight by an evil dream, picked up a copy of Aesop's Fables from the table and read until she became convinced that John was threatened by some great danger. Immediately she aroused Bridget, and accompanied by Rainface went dashing to the rescue.

Within the shack John, aroused by the smoke from the stupor into which the drugged coffee had put him, awoke to find himself bound and with a rope around his neck. Though he could feel and dimly see the lariat that led from his neck through the roof, he could not see where it terminated and beyond knowing that he was in desperate danger had little idea of what had taken place since he drank the drugged cup. Vigorously he began writhing and tugging at his bonds. The smell of the smoke and the crackling of the fire still further alarmed him. Already the fire was burning into the rope which held the tree which was bent like a bow, and led on by the loose powder which the pair had scattered about, the flames had begun to attack the building itself. Pungent wreaths were forcing themselves through the cracks and interstices of the building and the captive could feel the hot breath of the rising flames upon his cheeks. Plainly he was in imminent danger of being burned alive if nothing else, and he redoubled his struggles to loose himself from the thongs which fastened him to the bunk.

Warned by the finding of Davis' dead horse by the side of the trail that their assistance was sorely needed, Ethel and the Indian galloped wildly along the path. Reaching the shack she pulled her horse violently back upon its haunches.

One glance around told her the whole damnable story. Through the circling smoke she saw the tree bent over the shack, its restraining rope already half eaten through by the fire, as well as the lariat that hung from the sapling through the hole in the roof. The door of the little building was tightly latched, but rushing through the fire and smoke she struck it with the impetuosity of a flying bomb. It gave way before her and she burst into the room.

Through the smoke she saw that the lower end of the lasso was fastened about the neck of the man she loved, and knew that in a second or two more unless she saved him his head must be torn from his body. His face was toward her, contorted from the violence of his struggles to escape his fetters. At sight of her his lips parted.

"Hurry," he cried. "Make haste." But he had no need to urge the girl to speed. Pausing but long enough to take in the scene with a lightning glance, she leaped forward, knife in hand. One sweep of the blade and the rope was severed close above her lover's neck, and the loose end springing up twisted itself around a rafter of the shack. Nor was she a second too soon. Scarcely had the released lasso coiled serpent-like about the beam than the fire-gnawed rope without parted.

Leaping to the upright like a Gibraltar bursting the bonds of Lilliputians, it tore the roof from the structure as though it had been a roof of paper, flinging it in fragments high in the air and scattering the remnants over the rocks far and wide. The wild burst of flame which followed arose to the height of the tallest trees, while myriads of sparks went floating away in the dim morning light.

Miles upon their way the fleeing Hawk and Spider, turning in their saddles, saw the upward leap of flames and the faintly twinkling sparks, laughing at the sight.

"That's good-by for Davis, and he's damned to him," said Morgan as they again urged their horses on.

All but overcome by the exertion of her furious ride, the nervous suspense she had endured while in the saddle and the shock which had nearly floored her at sight of John's deadly peril, Ethel collapsed weakly against the door jamb in the midst of the down-pour of sparks and dust. Rainface, rushing past her, fell upon Davis, and the girl almost immediately recovering her strength went to his assistance. Together they dragged the still prostrated one to the cool air without and laid him upon the grass, finding that save for the fact that he was so stiffened from his bonds that he was practically unable to move he was uninjured.

"Where are Morgan and Bellas?" demanded Ethel. Davis shook his head.

"I don't know, Ethel. In fact, I cannot explain it. I suppose that dastardly Hermit has been at work again." The girl's head shook.

"I do not believe it," was her answer. Taking his hand she seated herself beside him as she told him of the reading of the Fable by old Aesop. Laughing lightly at her suspicious and telling her that she was silly to believe such things, he added that it at least would do no harm for them to go to the station and make inquiries. At once she assented.

"Yes. But I am not going to leave you again. I shall go with you."

"Me, too," added Rainface. With Davis mounted upon the horse of Rainface, Ethel upon her's and the Indian loping along in their rear, the trio gained the station some two hours later. Going to the agent they began making their inquiries.

"Yes," responded the latter. "Two men such as you describe took the 7:20 express for Frisco. The next train to leave here is the 10:30, which arrives there at 4 p. m."

Davis started to write a telegram, but finally listening to the arguments of Ethel, desisted.

"It would be much better to surprise them," she said.

"Have your own way," was the good-natured reply, and tearing up the message they turned their steps toward the little western town across the track. Ethel pointed to a small but well stocked general store such as are found in towns of this character.

"I would like to make a few purchases before we depart," she said, and John immediately acquiescing she started upon her errand. Ten-thirty found them boarding the Frisco train.

Morgan and Bellas debarking from their coach at San Francisco, crossed the platform arm in arm. The former was speaking.

"I'll engage rooms for us at the Mackenzie. You wait around here until the next train arrives. If he escaped, he will be upon it sure. And I want to know. You might have use for some money, so here it is. When you report to me later, ask for Mr. Hawk." Handing the Spider a big roll of bills he departed, and a short time later engaged rooms at the hotel mentioned.

Left behind on guard and strolling aimlessly about, the Spider was hailed by a taxi cab driver, and approaching him recognized a pal of old. Drawing the latter beyond the earshot of others the Spider spoke in a whisper.

"You've done some good tricks for me in the past, Bill, and I want to

give you a chance to earn a little coin. I'll be across the street. If you get the right parties I'll give you the high sign, and if you drop them over the cliff there'll be a thousand dollars in it for you. You know me."

"You're all right and a good feller. But what chance is there that these birds will fly along this way?" The Spider winked knowingly.

"Ever hear of, such a thing as a telegraph line, Bill?"

"Seems to me I once read of one, Spider. Why?"

"Well, there's one of them lines running back to the town where they were to board the train, and there's an agent there that is supposed to answer honest questions. That ought to be enough for you. Now I'll beat it across the way to that saloon and if you land them in your cab, stop there a moment for your slice of the coin." Without saying more he walked in the direction he had indicated.

As the 4 o'clock train drew into the depot, John and Ethel stepping from their car, found themselves confronted by a respectful mannered chauffeur who pointed to his cab and begged their patronage.

"Might as well take you as anyone, I suppose," said John, assisting the girl into the conveyance. "Take us to the Mackenzie." He seated himself beside his companion.

Across the street in front of the saloon in which the Spider was hidden, the driver stopped his machine.

"Just a moment, lady and gent," he called to them as he crossed the sidewalk toward the door of the place. "I've got to leave a message here for a friend, then I'll be on the way."

Not liking the actions of the other, Davis, arising in his seat, found himself able to see above the low swinging door of the saloon. Within the interior he could make out the form of their driver in earnest conversation with a man whose back was toward them and whom he could not recognize. A moment later he saw the stranger pass the chauffeur a large wad of money, whereupon the latter at once returned to the machine and began driving them away at a high rate of speed. Rendered somewhat suspicious from what he had seen but not wishing to alarm Ethel, Davis said nothing but kept his eyes closely glued upon the man in front. Suddenly John burst forth, tapping on the window to attract the attention of the one who drove.

"Here, you! This is not the way to the Mackenzie. Stop this machine." The only reply of the one at the wheel was to step harder upon the accelerator. John grasped the girl by the arm.

"I believe the man is mad. He's heading us straight for the bluff. Get out of here—quick!" Opening the door he stepped forth and stood upon the running board, holding Ethel firmly as he glanced ahead. Close beyond was the almost sheer descent of the bluff, and upon it the machine was charging with the speed of a running horse. With but a moment remaining Davis hesitated no longer. Raising the girl in his arms he sprang.

By good luck they landed in a hedge, arising a moment later unhurt. The cab, now a short distance ahead of them, was swerving sharply into the fence which guarded the bluff, and even as they looked they saw the driver leap from his seat and alight safely upon the ground. The next instant the cab had crashed through the fence and gone over the edge, to be smashed into kindling wood below. Davis started toward the rascal who had attempted to murder them, his blood boiling with rage.

Staring at the approaching one as though confronted by a ghost, the as-

tonished driver stood white of face and with trembling knees. Then as he saw the light of rage that burned in the eyes of the onstriding man, with a gasping cry of "Good God! How did you get out?" he slid over the edge of the cliff and vanished in a shower of dirt and following stones. Davis, upon the verge of following him, so great was his anger, was restrained by the girl who clung desperately to him. At last, permitting himself to be influenced by her entreaties, he took her arm and they proceeded upon their way on foot.

Arriving at their hotel they registered and took a suite of rooms, one for Ethel and one for John. While Rainface, who had accompanied them on the train but had ridden in the smoker and walked to the hotel, encamped himself in the living room which the rooms of the other two adjoined. Worned from their adventures of the day, they retired for a short rest.

From a corner of the lobby Morgan watched their arrival, then going into the bar paced impatiently up and down as he awaited the arrival of the Spider. Not long after that gentleman entered, and the Hawk drew him into a private booth.

"Well!" he exclaimed angrily. "They turned up right side up with care, as usual and all our work has been in vain. Explain yourself." Coolly Bellas answered him.

"I gave Bill a thousand dollars to dump them over the bluff in his machine, but it seems that they got wise to what was coming and leaped just as the taxi went over. However, it wasn't no fault of mine." Morgan leaped to his feet with a savage curse.

"A cool thousand gone to the dogs and nothing done. D'ye think I'm made of money?" The Spider laughed.

"Take it easy, Hawk. I did my best, and what's a thousand with millions in the mine—for the orphans?"

"Yes. And we're the orphans," muttered the Hawk. Having taken his rest, Davis immediately began his inquiries for Morgan. From the bartender of the hotel buffet he learned that the latter had been there, and had been heard to remark that he was going to Colefills in search of some old friends and a faro game. Remembering that this was the place where he had located his cousin at the time he had come to advise him of the death of John Carr and the terms of the will, John started for that well but unfavorably known resort of gamblers and their kind. Disappointment was his portion. Morgan was not to be found, and he returned to Ethel empty handed. Resolved to continue the search in the morning, they parted for the night with a farewell embrace. Rainface stretching himself upon the rug from which he could command both rooms, a gun at his side. In order that they might hear the old Indian should he call, both John and the girl left the door of their room ajar.

Morgan from the dark recess at Colefills from which he had watched the coming and departure of Davis, turned to the Spider.

"He'll go back to the Mackenzie. My room is 332, right across the hall from theirs. Go and engage 330, which is next to mine. Keep watch on them. I'll put old Ram Chunder on the job. We'll come up the fire escape."

Off went the Spider as directed, while the Hawk going down a street paused opposite a store which bore the sign:

"Ram Chunder. Dealer in East India Wares. To Learn the Future, Consult the Yogi."

The place was dark, but without hesitation Morgan pounced upon the portal. Before his summons a young Hindu in European dress opened the door, and after a brief scrutiny admitted him to the interior of a room in which Oriental goods were lavishly displayed. On every hand cabinets, tables, rugs, laces and ivories were strewn, but with scarcely a glance at them the incomer roughly demanded to see the Yogi. Quietly but firmly the attendant demurred, whereupon Morgan, advancing upon him threateningly, raised his voice in anger.

Within an adjoining room a very old Indian fakir, hearing the noise without, arose. The room in which he stood was fitted after the manner of a Hindu temple. Images of Vishnu and Siva squatted upon their pedestals. The room was low ceilinged, carved with grotesque animals entwined with altars placed before the figures of the gods. Incense bowls sat upon queer tables, their thin columns of smoke ascending perpendicularly in the still air. The long table which occupied the center of the room contained a gong, a curious casket, a basket and a crystal ball.

Listening for a moment to the racket outside, Ram Chunder stepped to a peephole and peered out. Seeing Morgan he hastily donned a long embroidered coat and placed a turban upon his head. Winkled, skinny and evil looking in the mellow light, he seated himself at a table and threw an extra

pinch of incense upon the nearest bowl. Then striking a light tap with a hammer upon the gong he fixed his gaze intently upon the crystal ball.

Shallum, the attendant without, hearing the stroke, turned from Morgan and opened the door. Solemnly Ram Chunder addressed him.

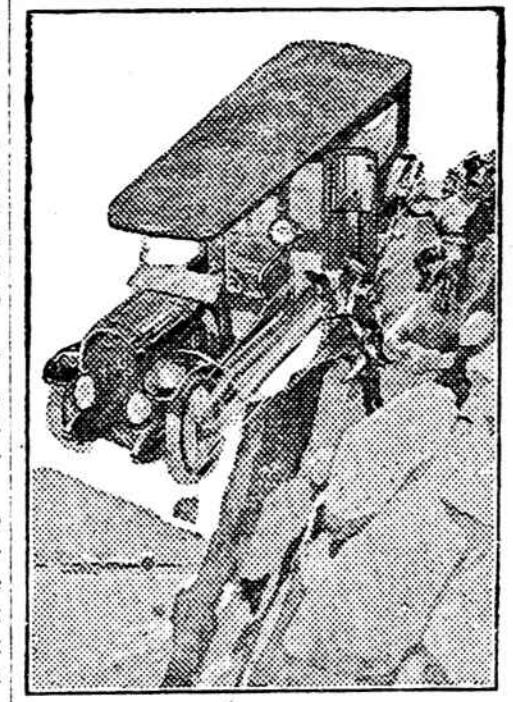
"The Holy Siva has revealed a stranger without. Admit the Sahib Morgan."

"The Hawk, entering, strode straight before the ancient one.

"At your old tricks," he laughed. "Cut out that Siva stuff and we'll get down to business." Monotonously came the reply of the fakir.

"Vishnu and Siva hunger and thirst. You know—"

With an exclamation of disgust the Hawk thrust a roll of money into the



By Good Luck They Landed Safely.

yellow claw which promptly extended itself as the roll appeared.

"Here's a lac of rupees—a thousand dollars—for them, and you." Thrusting the money within his coat, the old man replied:

"It is little—but the gods accept. What does the lord of the day ask in return?"

"The life of an enemy. Listen." In whispers he told him what he desired the other should know, and Ram Chunder, with a nod waved his hand mysteriously.

"The Holy Siva so decrees. The casket of death will serve."

At another stroke upon the gong Shallum again appeared. Taking a basket he packed within the same a small idol of Siva, incense bowls, a gong and a small casket with two carved metal handles fastened to the lid at the ends. Raising it aloft, Ram Chunder said solemnly:

"Behold the Casket of Death of Siva." Skeptically Morgan gazed at it.

"If it works, all right, Ram. But if not—well, remember I won't stand for any of your foolishness." Ram Chunder turned to him with the dull glow of a snake in his eyes.

"If you have come here to insult the gods, begone and I will throw your money at your heels. If you would have their help, save your insolence for your own God upon whom you call in vain when you would have your enemies removed." Knowing that he had gone too far, the Hawk grew apologetic.

"All right, Ram. I'll take it back and say no more."

"Then we will depart," said the ancient one. Beckoning Shallum, the three left the room together.

Silently the trio crept into the courtyard at the back of the hotel. Drawing a flute from beneath his coat Shallum sounded a series of low, mellow notes, and a moment later the Spider coming to a window parted the curtains, first peered and then beckoned. Crawling into the room of Bellas through the window which he raised for them, they unpacked the basket while Morgan began questioning the Spider. Silently the latter indicated to the incomers the location of the party in the opposite suite. Gravely Ram Chunder nodded.

"The Holy Siva will summon him hither. And then—"

Taking the small idol from the basket he laid the casket upon the table before it; placing incense bowls and powder about while Shallum took the gong. Prostrating himself Ram Chunder began a series of incantations and mesmeric waving of his hands in the direction of John's room, while ever the smoke of the incense grew thicker and more pungent. Shallum meanwhile striking the gong, filled the room with its low tolling. Losing his patience at last, Morgan burst forth.

"What is all this blamed foolishness about anyway? Cut it out and get down to business." Ram Chunder raised a threatening hand.

"Speak not, lest Siva blast you into dust."

With a convulsive movement the Spider grasped Morgan by the arm and pointed through the haze that had arisen from the incense bowls, and Morgan, looking in the direction indicated saw the vaguely outlined form of John's sleeping figure. With eyes

starting they sat rigidly, while the incantations of Ram Chunder grew more violent.

"Look!" whispered the Spider, greatly agitated. Staring still more intently, the bewildered Morgan saw the form of Ethel asleep in her bed, one arm thrown over her head.

"Great heavens!" he said with a shudder.

Within her room the girl, awakened by what she did not know, slowly opened her eyes. For a moment she rubbed them after the manner of one who has slept deeply and well, then as she lay looking at the ceiling the light of intelligence which had filled her pupils gradually faded, while in its place came the glassy, staring gaze of one who falls beneath the spell of a hypnotist. Over her form a convulsive shudder ran and twice she essayed to arise, each time seeming to be pulled back upon the bed by some invisible force. Then apparently the mysterious power which was urging her up triumphed, and slowly, uncertainly as one moves when in a daze, she threw aside the cover and stepped upon the floor.

Clad in her night robe, her white arms and upper bosom gleaming in the subdued light of her room, she seemed a thing ethereal as she slowly passed from her bed toward the door. Stepping around Rainface, who lay fast asleep upon the rug, she opened the door which led into the corridor, and going into it crossed the hall. Morgan and Bellas stepped forward, but the voice of the old fakir arose warningly.

"Touch her not. The Child of Siva—"

John Davis, asleep in his room, opened his eyes in bewilderment and sat blinking at the wall.

"Queer dream, that. Had a vision or dream or nightmare or something that Ethel was prowling around in her sleep and threatened by some danger. Guess I'd better investigate." Swinging his feet to the floor he passed out of the room.

Avoiding the Indian as the girl had done he hastened to the door leading into the corridor, opened it and glanced down the hall. Ethel was just disappearing into a room upon the other side, and to his partially sleep-begged senses she seemed to be floating spiritlike rather than walking with feet that touched the floor. Wondering what on earth it meant, and waiting only until she had disappeared behind the opposite panel, with two bounds he was at the door. It was locked. Already Morgan had turned the key.

Still beneath the occult influence of Ram Chunder, Ethel groped her way into the room across the hall. Ram, leaning forward, whispered fiercely in the Hawk's ear.

"He is coming after her," at the same time handing the other man a card upon which had been roughly scrawled:

"To find where she whom you seek has gone, open the casket." With a brief glance at the hastily written words, Morgan laid the card on the casket, and all hastily withdrew themselves into an adjoining room.

Davis, finding the door which barred his way locked placed his shoulder against it and gave a mighty heave. Before the violent impact of his body the lock burst as does a pipestem and he entered. The odor of incense still hung heavy in the air, and rushing to the window he opened it and thrusting out his head scanned the courtyard for Ethel. No sign of her was to be seen and turning his attention to the room he began to search it frantically. Closet and portieres yielded nothing, and upon the verge of starting for the next room where the conspirators crouched, his eye fell upon the small casket. Halted by the sight he stared wonderingly at it for a moment, then picked up the card.

Instantly the terrific power contained within the casket loosed itself into his body. Unable to release the handles of death he stood swaying, his eyes slowly closing, his face the color of death and his breath coming in gasps. Second by second the life was being shocked from his body.

Ram Chunder, opening the door of the other room at this moment, stood upon the threshold, one long, skinny finger pointing at the collapsing Davis. A smile of infinite evil was upon his drawn face.

"See! The power of Siva!" he exclaimed triumphantly. Baring a skinny arm he took from Shallum a long, serpentine-edged East Indian knife and began creeping forward.

Unable to endure longer the mysterious power which was shooting through his frame as living lightning, with a long, indrawn gasp John collapsed upon the floor. His hands still tightly clutched about the fatal handles.

"To make sure," breathed Ram Chunder, running his thumb across the edge of his ghastly weapon. Like a leopard he stole upon the helpless man upon the floor.

(END OF SEVENTH EPISODE.)



"It Would Be Much Better to Surprise Them," She Said.