

PERILS of THUNDER MOUNTAIN

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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 Ethel Carr's adopted daughter, for himself, and unsuspected by Davis whom Ethel really loves, makes several attempts on the life of Davis, assisted by an accomplice named Spider Bellas. Suspicion is diverted to a mysterious hermit. They go to San Francisco to get machinery to work the mine. Morgan seeks the assistance of Ram Chunder, an Indian fakir, who plots to kill Davis by means of the casket of death.

EPISODE 8.

THE IRON CLUTCH.

John Davis, lured by the sight of the vanishing Ethel into the room where the conspirators had left the Casket of Death of the Hindu god, Siva, and seeing the note lying upon it, grasped the casket by its handles to open it. Immediately the terrible power of the casket asserted itself, and unable to release the horrible thing John stood swaying, his vitals paralyzed by the mysterious force which the casket injected into his body like venom from the fangs of a deadly serpent. Swaying and gasping, his consciousness gradually leaving him, for a minute he managed to retain his feet, then with a gasp collapsed to the carpet. At that moment Ram Chunder, appearing upon the scene with a murderous, curved-edged East Indian knife, came stealing upon him.

"To make sure," he muttered as he approached.

Then in the act of administering the coup de grace he paused as though petrified, lifted his head turtlewise, listened for an instant, then wheeling like a flash vanished into the next room.

"That cursed Indian," growled Morgan who had also heard the sound. "We've got to beat it now." With one accord they rushed to the fire escape with the exception of Ram Chunder, who, pausing only long enough to make a few mystic passes over the head of the trance-walking girl, hurriedly joined them.

Awaking in the middle of the night, Rainface, wholly devoted to the girl, had listened for a moment at her door to make sure that she was sleeping undisturbed. Not hearing her breathing he cautiously stole a glance within only to see that her bed was empty, the coverlet lying half upon the floor. Suspecting mischief and a quick examination of the suite showing that she was not there, he stepped out into the hall, his nose at once becoming aware of the presence of the smell of the incense. Convinced that could he follow the trail of the strange odor to its source he would solve the mystery of the girl's disappearance, he traced it as a setter does the track of a partridge, a minute later finding himself standing before the door behind which she had gone. Throwing it open he entered the room, gun in hand.

His first glance showed him John lying upon the floor, the mysterious casket in his hands. One powerful kick from the Indian sent the thing of death flying from the clutch of the one who held it, bursting it apart and scattering its contents over the floor.

Springs, wires and a pair of electric batteries went rolling about.

Bewildered by it all, Rainface stood staring stupidly first at the uncoiled springs and tangled wires, then at the form of the unconscious John. Instinctively he had brought one of Ethel's wraps across his arm, and as his wits slowly returned he laid it upon a chair and peered from the window. In the courtyard below the party was just disappearing around a corner, the turbaned Ram Chunder following in the rear with one hand raised as though in malediction. Realizing that the escaping ones must have made their exit from the adjoining room he tried the knob. The door was locked, but stepping upon a chair he shattered the transom with the butt of his pistol. Ethel, in the room beyond, aroused from her trance by the sound, gave a little scream, then looking up saw the honest countenance of Rainface staring down at her. Obeying his signal she came unsteadily to the door, unlocked it and stood upon the threshold. Her next glance falling upon the prostrate form of her lover she ran to him, sinking upon her knees at his side.

"Bring me water and spirits of ammonia from my room," she commanded, and the Indian rushed away in swift obedience. Possessed of those articles she quickly revived the unconscious one sufficiently to enable him to sit up.

"Thank God!" she breathed. "John, what are you doing here?" "Something awakened me and I got up. I saw you crossing the hall and entering a room. I did not know what it meant, but feared that some-

thing was wrong and followed. When I came in you had vanished, but I saw a casket and a note. I lifted the box, received a terrible shock and remember no more." Ethel passed her hands across her brow.

"And I had a terrible dream. I saw a horrible old face, brown and fiendish and it was calling me. I had to obey." Rainface, bringing them what was left of the box, held it out without speaking.

"Storage battery," said John with a faint grin.

Back in the inner temple of Ram Chunder's shop, Morgan and the Spider were engaged in a heated discussion with the old fakir, who was defending himself vigorously. The dispute ended by the Hawk saying:

"All right. We will get him here in the morning." Ram Chunder bowed to the god Siva.

"The god will bring him here with the rising sun."

"He'd better," growled the other. The fakir pointed to a couch.

"Will the sahibs sleep under Siva's protection?" Morgan shook his head.

"The sahibs will not. It is safer to keep awake when dealing with you and your gods." Hating both the Hawk and Spider venomously for their blasphemy of his gods, Ram Chunder bowed ironically to the other.

"I go to avert their wrath from the sahibs," saying which he left the room.

Seating himself at a desk in the next room, Ram Chunder began laboriously writing. Having finished his note, he sprinkled incense over it and addressed it, "To Sahib Davis, at the Mackenzie Hotel," then leaning back looked at it malevolently.

"The gods will bring him here with this," he murmured.

He tapped a gong, and the next moment Shallum accompanied by a big Hindu in native costume appeared. The fakir handed the packet to the second Hindu.

"Deliver this, Joost Singh," he commanded.

John, having retired to his own room after his rescue by Rainface, found himself unable to sleep. Getting up he put on his slippers and dressing robe and entered the room across the hall. Once there he began to make a careful exploration of the place and its contents. Next seeing a paper rolled up, he noticed its watermark mark, then holding it to the light, read: "—dar Hyderabad—"

Noting that the label on the batteries was "San Francisco Electrical Supply Co. he returned to his own room and sat down to think it all over. With the first break of morning he dressed himself for the day and went to the place of business of the electrical company, arriving there just as it was being opened. Approaching a clerk he showed him the battery and asked if it would be possible to trace it to its original purchaser. The clerk smiled.

"No. We sell hundreds of these. Any particular one could not be identified."

"But do you remember having sold one to anybody from India?" pursued the visitor. The salesman thought.

"I sold a dozen of them last week to a wrinkled old Hindu. But I never saw him before and don't know his name."

"Thanks," replied Davis. Leaving the store he stepped into a Hindu restaurant and ordered his breakfast, engaging the native servant in conversation as he did so.

"Do you know any Hindu fortune tellers? I have a fancy for trying one." The attendant bowed.

"Many, Sahib, will try to tell your future. There are Holkar and others, but the greatest of all is Ram Chunder, the Holy Yogi."

"Where did he come from?" pursued the listener.

"From Hyderabad, I think, most worshipped sir."

Dismissing the other by paying him, John drew the paper from his pocket and looked at the watermark again.

"—dar Hyderabad—" he mused. Thrusting the paper back into his pocket he left the place, and going to the nearest drug store consulted the city directory.

Ethel, meanwhile, had finished her toilet for the day. Going into her living room she asked Rainface where John was, whereupon the old Indian handed her a note.

"Him gone. He leave this talking leaf." Quickly she ran her eyes over it.

"I am going to solve last night's mystery," it read. "I have a good clew, and do not worry, for I will be in no danger. Enjoy the day. I may return at any time. Devotedly yours, John."

Still a trifle uneasy notwithstanding the assuring words of the note, the girl thrust it in the bosom of her dress, and ringing the bell ordered her breakfast from the waiter who answered. Rainface, saying that he had an errand of his own to per-



Full Upon the Throat of Ram Chunder It Landed.

form, received her permission to depart and she was left alone. Shortly after the waiter entered with his tray, Joost Singh, following a few paces behind. The waiter spoke.

"This foreign party says he has a note for this apartment, Ma'am," and at her nod the Hindu laid his message before her with a salaam.

"For the Sahib Davis," he said respectfully, and turning left the room. Hastily the girl tore the note open. It read:

"If you seek to solve the mystery of the night, knock twice and then once at the rear door of number 27 Horton street. Your conductor will appear and bring you before the gods! May Vishnu and Siva guard you." Wondering what it could mean, whether John was again in danger and who the writer could be, she quickly ate a few mouthfuls and left the apartment, hurrying lest she be too late.

Shallum, dressed in American clothes and on watch outside the shop of Ram Chunder, saw Davis drive up in a taxi and hastened inside, locking the door behind him. Briefly he told his master of the coming of the other man, and the fakir, giving Shallum rapid directions, stepped to the inner room where the Hawk and Spider were.

"Siva has summoned him. He is here," was his announcement.

Throwing their cards out of sight the pair arose. Ram Chunder, leading them to a side of the room, opened a sliding door by pressing on a spring, disclosing a grating. Obeying his wave of command they entered, drawing the curtains together but leaving a crack through which they could both see and hear. Passing to the other side of the room Ram Chunder opened another concealed door, and at the clap of his hands four Hindus in native costume appeared. Addressing them in a low tone he began filling the incense bowls so that their smoke slowly commenced to arise. While this was being done, two of the newcomers placed a large chair of teakwood at the upper end of the table.

"We will now admit the Sahib," announced the fakir.

Having knocked at the outer door a number of times and received no response, John on the point of turning away discouraged, was confronted by Shallum, who with a low obeisance motioned for him to enter.

Rainface, returning to the hotel, caught a distant view of Ethel as she hurried on her way. Instantly he followed her. Seeing her board a trolley car, the Indian took the one next behind it, standing on the front platform where he could look ahead.

Arriving at Number 27 Horton street, the girl promptly knocked at the door. Joost Singh appeared, and though he was surprised to see a woman instead of the man he expected standing before him, he salaamed and indicated that she was to go with him.

"Where is Mr. Davis?" she demanded as she hesitated. The Hindu spread his hands in a gesture to indicate his ignorance, and finally deciding that her only chance of finding her lover was to trust herself to the other's guidance, she started down the side street on foot. Rainface, who had not lost sight of her, at once followed upon their trail.

John, entering the room of Ram Chunder, glanced about. Under each of the four corbels that supported the roof beams a motionless, statue-like Hindu stood. Even to the sharp eyes of the incoherent figures seemed to be integral parts of the wall, so perfectly did their brown bodies and costumes match the place. As the door closed behind him, Davis stepped before the fakir and addressed him sternly.

"Ram Chunder." The Hindu bowed.

"What were you doing at the Mackenzie hotel last night. Ram strewed a handful of incense in a bowl before an idol.

The Sahib mistakes. I was not at any hotel. Last night I communed with the gods. Behold!"

With an expression of disbelief and disgust, John drew forth the batteries and piece of paper.

"What about these? They are yours."

"Yes, protector of the poor, but stolen from me by a low dog of an imposter—a pariah. Will not the Sahib sit and listen to his servant explain?"

Thrown off his guard by the friendliness of the other's manner and smile, Davis complied.

The room was now heavy with incense. Waiting only till the white man had seated himself in the big chair, Ram Chunder pressed a spring. Instantly four steel bars shot out from the upper back and lower front of the chair, the first two crossing the trapped man's breast and the other pair firmly gripping his legs. John's pistol had seemed to leap into his hand at the first pressure of the bars, and as it exploded a small image of one of the gods fell to the floor with a crash. Ram's escape had been a narrow one, but John had been an instant too late.

No sooner had the bars clamped down upon their victim, holding him securely, than the four living statues stepped forward from their places against the wall and approached the fakir. Laying the revolver upon the table, they stood submissively before their master as they awaited his orders. Ram pointed to the shattered idol.

"This foreign dog has blasphemed the gods and has tried to kill their faithful Yogi. He must die."

At a sign from the fakir one of the Hindus advanced and pressed the back of the chair down and the front up, so that John, still held fast by the bars, lay as one upon a surgeon's table ready for an operation. Crossing his hands they bound his wrists together, a moment later doing the same with his legs. Then removing the restraining levers the four men raised the body of the helpless one, two taking his shoulders and two his knees. Clapping his hands, Ram motioned to two more Hindus who had silently entered at the signal.

"Gag him and wrap him firmly in the ropes," was his command. Round and about the prisoner they drew the bends until he was powerless to move.

At a signal from the fakir the six men raised the helpless form straight into the air. As they did so, six other brown arms suddenly appeared from some mysterious place in the ceiling, and seizing the prisoner instantly drew him out of sight, while the ones who had bound him again bowed their heads in submissive si-

lence. Motioning for them to leave his presence, Ram looked up at the ceiling just as the leaves of a trap through which the body of Davis had been dragged fell back into place. He bowed low to the image of Siva.

"So perish the offenders of the gods."

From behind their grille where they had been watching it all, the Hawk and Spider grinned at each other approvingly. Then Morgan laughed.

"I'll be cursed if he didn't put it over." Seizing the grating with his hands he began shaking it, but it resisted all his efforts. His voice arose in anger, as he drew his revolver.

"Let us out of here quick, you old fraud, or I'll let daylight out of you."

Carefully keeping to the side of the wall and beyond the range of the other's gun, Ram Chunder made his reply.

"The god has not yet directed your release, oh worthy protector of the poor." Shallum stepped into the room.

"The Mena Sahib you called last night, Master, has come again," he announced. The fakir again addressed Morgan.

"You little know the power of the gods, oh foreign born. The maiden is here also. Siva called." Cursing, the Hawk cried.

"I don't know anything about your infernal gods, but don't you hurt that girl or the whole bunch of you will have to reckon with me. You can do what you like with the man, but—"

"Bring her in," commanded the fakir.

We left Ethel and Joost Singh going down the street together. Arrived at the outer door the Hindu knocked, whereupon Shallum opened it, expressing his satisfaction as he admitted them. Rainface, coming up on a run, found himself locked out and cast his eyes about as he mentally decided upon his plan. Seeing a building close at hand in course of construction with scaffolding surrounding it and no one at work, he at once decided that by means of the scaffolding he could get upon the roof of the next building, and from thence to the top of the place inhabited by the Hindu. Off he went as fast as his legs could take him to carry out his plan.

Within his room, Ram Chunder bowed to the girl as she came in.

"You seek the aid and counsel of Holy Siva, maiden, pearl of beauty?" Straight up to him Ethel walked.

"I want Mr. John Davis. Is he here?"

With a nod Ram threw another handful of incense into the brazier, and once more the back of the room became clouded with smoke. Three times he struck a gong, and from the ceiling a gigantic image of Siva, the lower part of which was carved to represent drapery, slowly descended through the smoke. Down upon a dais at the end of the room it settled, while Shallum running to it began making mystic motions, while Ram stepped to the wall opposite the grating.

Before him was a graduated quadrant of metal marked in places and with a perpendicular reversible arm which could be swung along the arc to points on either side. The skinny, bony hand of the fakir seized the armature and began to move it, while the other hand pointed at the idol.

"BEHOLD!" he cried.

Slowly, silently the front of the figure opened and John stood revealed within. He was fastened to the back of the image by an iron collar about his neck, while iron bands bound his waist, arms and legs; holding him erect, rigid and motionless. His mouth was still covered by the cloth. His eyes were open, and he was apparently conscious of all that was taking place. The voice of the girl arose in great distress.

"John! Merciful heaven! What have they done?" She sprang toward him, but Ram seizing her with a strength that was astonishing in one of his age, held her back.

"Wait. He has not suffered yet. Siva is sometimes merciful. Perhaps—"

Shallum, approaching, bowed low. "Oh, reverend and beloved Master! Your elixir of life lacks but one thing."

"Continue," commanded the fakir as the other paused. Shallum lifted a curious drinking cup.

"This, filled with blood from the heart, drawn from beneath the left breast of a pure maiden and mixed with the other ingredients, will give back your youth, if holy Siva wills."

Turning upon the girl, Ram pointed to her heart with a long finger.

"Dost hear?" he said. "Here's life for my youth through thy blood!" Appalled, she shrank back.

"It cannot be."

For a moment he looked at her with an evil smile, then swung the arm of the quadrant and pressed it into a slot. As he did so from each door of the idol rows of spikes which had been lying flat sprang out at right angles to the door, pointing inward. Should the front of the idol now be

closed, the sharp pointed iron teeth would be pressed into the man within.

As the terrified girl uttered a scream, Ram Chunder moved the lever again and the two doors closed about half way. Ethel's arms stretched themselves forward in an appeal to the old Hindu.

"Take off the handkerchief and let him speak for himself," was his command to Shallum, and the latter obeyed. Instantly John's voice arose, anger filled, defiant.

"Let me die a thousand deaths, Ethel, before you permit that vile dog to touch you." From behind the grating the voice of the Spider addressed Morgan in a low tone.

"Let's put a stop to this nonsense." The Hawk shoved him aside.

"Wait. There is time enough yet. Let's see what she will do. We won't let them put anything over on her." Weapons in hands, they awaited the outcome of the tragic scene in the room beyond.

Ram Chunder spoke again.

"You both refuse? Very well, we shall see. Siva must persuade you a little further it would seem."

Again he moved the lever, and lower doors almost closed. A look of pain shot across the face of the imprisoned man. Quickly he mastered it and smiled at the girl, who stood petrified by terror. Calmly his voice filled the room.

"It will soon be over. You must not give away, dearest girl." Ram Chunder leered at him.

"No. Not so swift as you would desire. See!"

Very slowly, watching their faces with a cruel smile, he again turned the lever a bit and slowly the upper doors began to move. Nearer and nearer the body of the man the deadly fangs of steel drew until they almost touched his person. The face of the threatened one did not change as it looked at them through the ever-narrowing aperture. Suddenly Ethel, unable to endure the torture of suspense longer, screamed.

"Yes, yes. I will grant anything you may ask. For God's sake stop. You are not human—you are fiends." Before the words had fairly left her mouth she had torn open her dress at the breast, standing before them white as death, and weeping upon her feet in her mental agony.

Upon one side of her Shallum raised a cup. The fakir, drawing a small but very bright bladed knife such as surgeons use, thrust it slowly toward her breast.

Rainface, having reached the door of a room on the floor above, stood listening a moment with ears that were as keen as a wolf's. Then as a peculiar sound from within reached them, he noiselessly drew his gun with one hand and began opening the door with the other.

Stepping into the room with the tread of a cat, he saw six Hindus upon their knees on the floor looking through an open trap into the room below. Approaching them from behind he jabbed one of them with the muzzle of his weapon, and at that they sprang to their feet with low exclamations of surprise. One look into his fierce, grim old face was enough, and at his gesture their hands flew on high. Driving them silently to a corner of the room where they huddled before the threatening muzzle, Rainface stretched himself upon the floor and keeping one eye upon his victims, peered into the room below. His first glance showed him the girl with her dress torn open across her bosom, Shallum with the cup upon one side of her, Ram Chunder with his glistening blade upon the other.

Casting his eyes upward, Morgan saw the face of the old Indian at the opening, glowing with hatred upon the Hindus below. He seized the Spider by the arm with a grip so fierce that the other winced.

"See that cursed Indian up there. He is going to spoil everything."

And even as he spoke the Indian acted. Still covering the Hindu gang with his gun in his left hand he raised himself a little, whipped out a long and keen hunting knife and raised it on high, then hurled it into the room below.

Spinning through the air with a vicious whistle it came hurtling as a bolt of lightning from the heavens. Full upon the throat of Ram Chunder it landed point first, burying itself there. And Ram with a gasping cry, dropped his lancet and staggered back. Dropping his bowl, Shallum sprang forward to catch him.

"He's done it!" cried Morgan from behind the grille.

Thrusting the muzzle of his gun against the lock, the Hawk pulled the trigger and as the heavy bullet tore the bolts apart he seized the grating and wrenched it open. With weapons raised threateningly, he and the Spider burst into the room just as Ram Chunder sank to the floor in the arms of Shallum and at the feet of the terror-stricken girl.

(END OF EIGHTH EPISODE.)