

Perils of Thunder Mountain

by ALBERT E. SMITH and CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

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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 sensational attempts upon the life of Davis. Suspicion is diverted to a mysterious hermit. They all go to San Francisco to get machinery for the mine. There Davis miraculously escapes more attempts upon his life. Morgan conspires with a dock foreman to imprison Davis in a diving bell.

EPISODE 10

THE FLAMING SACRIFICE

John Davis, lured into the diving bell by the hiring superintendent of Morgan, found the contrivance in which he was confined being lowered to the depths of the bay. Soon becoming aware of the fact that he was rapidly being asphyxiated in the small iron chamber, and with no way of escape possible, he seized a hammer and knocking off a valve leading to a tube which communicated with the dock above, shouted several times for help. Receiving no response he sank exhausted upon the floor of the upper chamber.

Ethel Carr, reaching the rock above the bell and realizing that something wrong was going on, drew a revolver and compelled a near-by workman to raise the bell by means of its hoisting machinery. As the ponderous affair came up, its lip struck a submerged pile, tipping it violently and causing John's half unconscious form to slip through the trap which was in the floor of the upper chamber in which he was confined. When the bell reached the top, Ethel, mounting a ladder, opened the entrance door and looked down into the bell's interior. No one was there. Believing that her lover had met his death, she swooned and fell back into the arms of a workman who eased her to the wharf. At that moment Morgan and Bellas came running up.

"We had better go back to the hotel," said the Hawk as the girl revived. "That is, all of us except the Spider, who will stay here and report to us if he learns anything." Not knowing any better mode of procedure, the girl assented.

As soon as the three were out of sight, the Spider got in the Seabird and started across the bay for the Waterside saloon where he was sure he would find the superintendent, Simpkins.

That John was not dead was due to a series of coincidences. When the bell tilted he had slipped into the lower chamber of the machine, and therefore into the water. Another second or two and the bell had risen above him, leaving him at the mercy of a strong inflowing tide which bore his body under the wharf and out of sight of those above. Struggling feebly and half unconscious, he drifted along until he came in contact with one of the crosspieces which bound together the great wooden piles which supported the wharf. Throwing his arm over this piece he hung there gasping for air, and in no condition to call for help or make further effort to save himself.

As the minutes passed, however, his strength gradually returned. Presently his attention was attracted to a small-painted "bob" such as fishermen use to keep their bait afloat, and which now came drifting past him, borne under the wharf by the tide as he had been. Seeing that a fishing line was attached to the bob, and that the line ran up over the edge of the wharf, he seized it, gave it a series of jerks as he feebly called for help.

On the wharf above the youth who was holding the other end of the line, felt the tugs and responded vigorously as he cried out that he had an old whopper of a fish. Then as he heard the cry from below his eyes nearly popped from his head in his astonishment.

"Holy mackerel! The fish is talking," he screamed. Dropping his line he went scampering across the footbridge, not stopping until he reached home and mother. He threw himself into her arms.

"I caught a whopper of a fish and it yelled for help," he panted. Becoming worried at the persistence with which the boy repeated his assertions, she finally called her husband.

"Mebby the kid did hear something. There might be someone under the wharf, so I guess we'd best go and take a look," was the man's response. Under the wharf, John, minute by minute, had been regaining his strength. Hearing the approach of the man and woman who had been brought here by the story of the boy, he raised his voice in a shout.

"The kid was right after all," cried the man, and bending over the edge caught sight of the wet, upturned face below.

"Get a rope in a hurry. I'm most all in," gasped the one in the water, and with a word of encouragement the man hurried away. Almost instantly he came back with a boat's painter,

and making a loop in it lowered it to the half drowned one who promptly slid it over his shoulders. Then with the three who stood above hauled upon the line, the man whom they were rescuing giving them what little aid he could.

"You must come over to our house and get some dry clothes," said the woman sympathetically, and the rescued one thankfully accepted the offer. At their cottage he was quickly provided with one of the man's suits, a half seaman's rig with boots and cap. Wholly comfortable once more, he ate a little food and felt himself fully restored. The man, who proved to be the caretaker of the island, addressed him.

"Well, Mr. Davis, you have had a rough deal and I don't understand it. But I took Simpkins, the superintendent, across the bay in the ferry. He was headed for the Waterside saloon when I left him. Maybe he can explain."

"I'll give him a chance," returned John grimly. "If you are ready we will go." Handing the youthful fisherman who had been the means of his being rescued a good-sized bill, John and the caretaker stepped into the motor ferry and started across the bay headed for the Waterside saloon.

Within that joint the Spider, Simpkins and others were playing cards. With an exclamation of disgust at his ill luck, the former threw down his hand and stepping to the window looked out across the water. The next instant an exclamation of anger burst from his lips, and turning away he hastened back to the group.

"He's got away again, curse him, and the caretaker is bringing him across in a launch. How had we better receive him, Simpkins?" Unmistakably excited that gentleman arose to his feet and led them back to the window.

"See that schooner?" said he as he indicated a craft that lay in the bay, hove short, sails in the brails and evidently ready to make a quick start. "If we get him aboard the Sarah J., Cap'n Jacob will have him thoroughly tamed before they get back from Honolulu. Savey?" The Spider nodded and pointed to an adjoining room as he addressed the barkeeper.

"If he comes into the saloon looking for anybody, send him in there. You, Simpkins, take a seat facing the door, and we will wait for Mr. Davis behind the door of that next room. Hustle now." Quickly they took their places as the Spider had commanded.

Having landed and bidden the caretaker farewell for the time being, John went straight to the Waterside saloon and entered. Stepping up to the bar he asked the aproned one behind it if he had seen Simpkins.

"He's in there alone—takin' a little nap, I guess," was his reply. John crossed the floor and opened the door. Sitting before him upon a chair and smiling wickedly through his cigar smoke was the man whom Davis sought. Three steps and the incomer stood before him.

"You tried to murder me in that diving bell," he said as his hand fell upon the other's shoulder. "But now—"

From behind the door where they had stood unobserved by the entering one, a figure came sneaking with heavy revolver upraised. As John's fingers closed upon the shoulder of the man who had tried to foully kill him, the butt of the weapon descended upon the back of his head and with a gurgling cry he pitched forward upon his face.

At Simpkin's order ropes were secured and the victim securely pinioned. This done he was carried from the place, tossed into a rowboat and swiftly sculled to the Sarah J., craft of the ill-famed Captain Jacobs. Still senseless but showing signs of returning consciousness, John was passed aboard and delivered into the tender mercies of the skipper.

Shortly later the shanghaied one upon the fore-castle bunk opened his eyes and stared about. At once he recognized his whereabouts, and the swish of water against the bow of the schooner told him that the craft, whatever she might be, was under way. Determined to learn the meaning of it all, he went up the short ladder and stepped upon the deck.

He started aft but had made but a few steps before he was intercepted by the mate. Pushing the latter aside by a sweep of his arm, the shanghaied man stopped not until he stood before Captain Jacobs. The skipper whirled upon him with an evil look.

"What do you mean by coming aft, you slob?" he demanded fiercely. Davis looked him squarely in the eye.

"I am John Davis, an attorney of Los Angeles. I demand to be put ashore." The skipper sneered.

"Likely looking attorney you are, in that rig. I'll tell you who you are, all right. You're a foremast hand on my schooner. Go for'rd and turn to."

Understanding it all now and realizing the futility of argument, John acted like a flash. Straight from the shoulder his fist leaped against the skipper's chin, and with a grunt that

worthy collapsed upon the deck. Pausing only long enough to see the effect of his blow, John grabbed the painter of the dingy which the Sarah J. was towing, leaped into it, and cutting the painter got out the oars and began rowing desperately for the shore just as the mate and several of the crew came running aft.

The smitten skipper arose to his feet, roaring.

"Lower a boat and get after that man, or I'll skin every jack of you alive." Climbing into the quarterboat and with four seamen at the oars, Jacobs seized the tiller and the pursuit began.

Rowing his best, the escaped one saw that he could not hope to hold his own with the four oarsmen who were so hotly pursuing him. That he would soon be overhauled and taken back to the schooner to be grossly manhandled and carried to he knew not what foreign port, was a fact that became more and more apparent each moment as the distance between the two flying craft swiftly diminished. Driven to desperation, John decided upon a ruse which if successful might put the advantage upon his side. Abruptly he ceased rowing.

Thinking that the fugitive had recognized the impossibility of escape and resigned himself to the inevitable, Captain Jacobs ordered his men to cease rowing and hold their oars perpendicularly that he might swing the quarterboat alongside the dingy. As the four seamen obeyed and the skipper with a sweep of the rudder brought his craft within a few feet of the now listlessly floating boat of John, the latter leaped to his feet, boat hook in hand.

Two vicious sweeps of the iron tipped hook he made, and before those savage blows the upraised oars of the quarter boat went down with a crash as saplings fall before a hurricane. Two were snapped off at the blade, one knocked into the water and the fourth badly splintered. Throwing down the boat hook and resuming his oars, John with a parting laugh swept on his way, leaving his enemies raging impotently with no means of propelling their craft in pursuit. Fifteen minutes later he was debarking at the spot where he had been landed by the caretaker, and wiping the perspiration from his brow started for the Waterside saloon. With his blood thoroughly aroused by the treatment he had received from Simpkins, he had no idea of leaving the place until he had settled accounts with that vile scoundrel.

Opening the door of the place with a swift push, Davis looked within. Simpkins was at the bar drinking with the barkeeper, the others who had taken place in the assault having left the place. As the returned one stepped over the threshold the superintendent, uttering a curse, took a step back and began tugging at his revolver, while at the same instant the barkeeper reached beneath the counter for his weapon. Quick as a flash the incomer snatched a bottle from the bar. Before its blow the saloon man went down with a crash and lay prone, and with one enemy disposed of, John wheeled upon the other.

Simpkins had drawn his revolver and was in the act of firing. With not a second to lose, Davis hurled the bottle at him, and as the heavy glass missile landed full in the superintendent's face, the latter reeled backward and dropped to the floor. But quick as a cat he was upon his feet again, and seeing his opponent advancing upon him, and with no time to regain the revolver which had flown from his hand, the murderous-minded one turned and fled with John in hot pursuit.

Mortally in fear of his antagonist now that his revolver was gone, Simpkins ran with the agility of an ape. Bounding up a flight of stairs he reached the room above, where springing upon a table he threw up a trap which led to the roof above and pulled himself through. John, close at his heels, was in the act of following when the one upon the roof slammed the trap-door down. For a moment ensued a struggle between the one above and the one below, then with a violent effort John hurled the door aside and leaped upon the roof of the building. Simpkins, at bay and desperate, rushed at him like a cornered rat.

They closed in hand to hand combat. Three times with savage blows John knocked his antagonist flat, but such was the vitality and toughness of the man that each time he leaped to his feet and renewed the battle as fiercely as before. By a lucky blow upon Davis' chin the villain staggered him back, and seizing advantage of the second's opportunity this gave him, the superintendent whipped a knife from his pocket and rushed in with a savage sweep of the weapon. Barely in time John caught his wrist, and then ensued a silent but desperate battle to a finish between an unarmed man and a foe nearly as powerful who possessed a deadly weapon. From edge to edge of the roof they fought for the mastery, with the issue ever in doubt. John, his clothing slashed in a dozen places, still managed to divert the keen blade from his body, and finally securing a hold that gave him the necessary leverage, raised the other high in air. Poising him for an instant while he gathered all his remaining strength, he sent the writhing, squealing would-be assassin flying headlong through the air and over the edge.

Panting from his exertions the victor returned to the saloon in search of the barkeeper, but that worthy having had enough of Davis' game had incontinently fled. Pausing but long enough to assure himself of this fact, the ragged conqueror left the place on his way to the hotel. Back in the temple of Ram Chunder, the dead body of the fakir lay in state before the image of Siva. Shallum and the rest of the Hindus were gathered before an East Indian basket three feet in diameter, and which possessed a lid in the center of which was a round hole. A Hindu boy, small and delicate, was seated upon it. All were listening to the words of Shallum.

"I will put presents in this basket for the white devils, and the boy here shall be hidden beneath them. I have explained what is to be done." At a

motion of his hand the boy curled himself in the bottom of the basket and was covered with laces and embroideries, then, at a further signal from Shallum, Joost-Singh and another Hindu raised the receptacle in their arms.

"Follow me," commanded Shallum. They reached the Hotel Mackenzie, and Shallum rapped at the door of the Americans. As it was opened a glance within showed him Ethel, Morgan and Rainface. As the three started up in surprise, the Hindu made low obeisance.

"Please, Sahib, I come in sorrow and repentance, not in war or hate." At his motion Joost-Singh and the other Hindu appeared, bearing the basket between them. Shallum spoke again.

"The Holy Ram Chunder is dead, but before he went to the abode of the gods he commanded me to ask the Sahibs their forgiveness and accept his gifts in token of his repentance." He opened the lid of the box and began laying the laces before Ethel, but Morgan interposed roughly.

"Very well. We'll forgive him seeing he is dead. Leave the stuff and get out." With a bow which concealed his glare of hate, Shallum and his followers retired. Scarcely had they disappeared than in came the Spider.

Ethel rushed up to him with hands outstretched.

"John—Mr. Davis! Did you find trace of him?" she cried. Solemnly the Spider shook his head.

"No, Miss. Not a trace. We dragged the water in front of the dock, but found nothing."

Throwing herself upon a couch the heart-broken girl covered her face with her hands.

"It certainly is too bad," consoled the Hawk hypocritically.

Suddenly she sat erect, eyes wide and ears straining. Then with a cry she leaped to her feet and went running to the door.

"He is coming!" she almost screamed. "I heard his footsteps in the hall." With a face flown white she threw the door wide, and there upon the threshold ragged and dirt-covered stood Davis. Another second and she was in his arms.

Great as was their surprise and rage, the Hawk and Spider were compelled to swallow their emotions. As Davis released the girl, the scoundrelly pair came forward with hands outstretched and smiles upon their faces. The greeting over, all demanded that he tell the story of his adventures which he briefly did, ending up with a grim laugh.

"So you see I've been run over, crushed, blown up, drowned, assaulted, shanghaied—it is evident I am doomed to die in bed after all." Admiringly Morgan looked him over.

"You've played in great luck, old man. We have engaged the men, closed the deal for the machinery and are ready to start back for God's country—which is the mine, of course."

"Meanwhile for another suit of clothes, then we will all go down and dine," said Davis. Going to his room he made his change, and this done all left the apartment.

Scarcely had they departed the room than the head of the Hindu boy arose from the basket silent as a cobra's. Making sure that he was alone, the youth took from his pocket several little pierced silver balls, and going to a faucet, held them under the running water. The balls contained the sleep producing perfume of the Orient, which when the water reached it after being absorbed by the outer covering of the balls, would then escape and fill the air with its sweet smelling fumes. Going to John's room he put one under the mattress, another in the same place in Ethel's chamber and four more in different hiding places in the living room. This done he went out of the window and secreted himself upon the fire escape.

Having finished their meal in the dining-room below, John stifled a yawn. "Inasmuch as we must make an early start and are all tired tonight, I move that we adjourn to bed. Rainface and I will take the middle room and watch until midnight. Morgan and Bellas can have my room until twelve o'clock, then watch until morning. We must not take any more chances." All agreeing to this sensible proposition, they returned to the apartment.

Late evening came. Creeping along the fire escape the Hindu boy peeped into each room successively. A glance told him that Morgan and the Spider were already soundly sleeping beneath the drug, while in the living-room Davis was beginning to nod heavily and Rainface, sliding slowly from the couch, came to full length upon the floor. Ethel was also unconscious, and with a smile of satisfaction the prowler crept into the room.

Taking a rope from the basket he approached a window which fronted over an alley and lowered it, giving it two or three signal jerks. A moment later it became taut and, one close behind the other, Joost-Singh and a follower entered the room, while as they did so the boy went sliding down. Joost-Singh, passing through the apartment, saw the victims all asleep and uttered a malediction. Rainface, who because of his slipping to the floor had escaped most of the fumes and still retained his consciousness, had rolled under the lounge out of sight as the pair entered.

Binding the sleeping four and covering their mouths with handkerchiefs the Hindus lowered them one by one to the ground where Shallum, aided by the boy, quickly deposited them in a covered automobile truck. This done, the Hindu helper slid down the rope and Joost-Singh, tossing the basket out was preparing to follow, when

from under the couch a sneaky brown hand crept, clutched his ankle as in a vise. Before the victim realized what was happening his legs were jerked from under him and he fell like a log, his head crashing against an iron radiator and fracturing his skull.

In the covered truck below Shallum was waiting the coming of Joost-Singh with ever increasing impatience. A Hindu whom he had left on guard, came running up to him.

"Officers are coming," was his report. Shallum seized the wheel of the machine.

"We can wait no longer for Joost-Singh. Siva will protect him." Starting the engine, they drove swiftly into the night.

Rainface crawled out from beneath the couch, and with a single glance at his fallen foe ran swiftly from room to room. All were vacant. His senses, half bewildered by the fumes of the balls, and lying as he had been beneath the low couch, he had not seen what had passed, and as all had been done silently and without words the disappearance of his companions was a profound mystery to him. Now as his head cleared in the fresh air of the open window he bent over the prostrate form of Joost-Singh and shook him. No signs of life appearing, he secured a glass of cold water and dashed it in the other's face. Slowly the eyes of the Hindu opened.

Drawing his knife the Indian put its point against the throat of the fallen one.

"What have you done with them? Where are they? Speak or you die," he said fiercely. Joost-Singh gasped.

"When the first sun rays mingle with the fire in the woodland altar of Holy Siva, the god will demand his sacrifice. I die. My curse will lay heavy upon you and them."

His eyes rolled wildly and a low rattle came to his throat. He half raised himself to a sitting posture and stared horribly at the man who had given him the fall which had fractured his skull, then with a gasping shudder fell back to arise no more.

Sorely puzzled and greatly alarmed at the mysterious words of the now dead man, Rainface arose and began a close inspection of the room. A moment later he found the rope dangling from the window and peered down into the alley. Wondering whether he had not best go to the office and report the mysterious affair to the hotel authorities, he stood for a moment debating, then his Indian instinct of secrecy and personal action prevailed. Having first made a hurried exploration of the hall and all the rooms to which he could secure access and finding no one there, he returned to the apartment, and once more peered from the window. Below him he saw two officers in uniform passing, and waiting until they had gone a short distance past the rope and their backs were turned to it, he grasped it and slid swiftly to the ground. A few steps brought him up to the sauntering policemen.

"You see some white men and white woman go out of here pretty quick ago?" he demanded as the blue-coated guardians scanned him up and down in curiosity. The pair laughed at the queerly pronounced words of the ancient one.

"Hello, Injun! What are you doing here? Are you lost?" A heavy scowl settled over the questioned one's face.

"No, me no lost. Me here. White folks lost. You see 'um, mebbysso?" One of the officers pointed up the alley.

"No, Injun, we didn't see anybody, but we did see a yellow covered automobile truck go up the alley and drive down the street. Some kind of foreign dago was at the wheel. They turned to the right when they hit the street." With the dart of a wolf the red man was upon the trail, leaving the uniformed pair staring after him in wonderment.

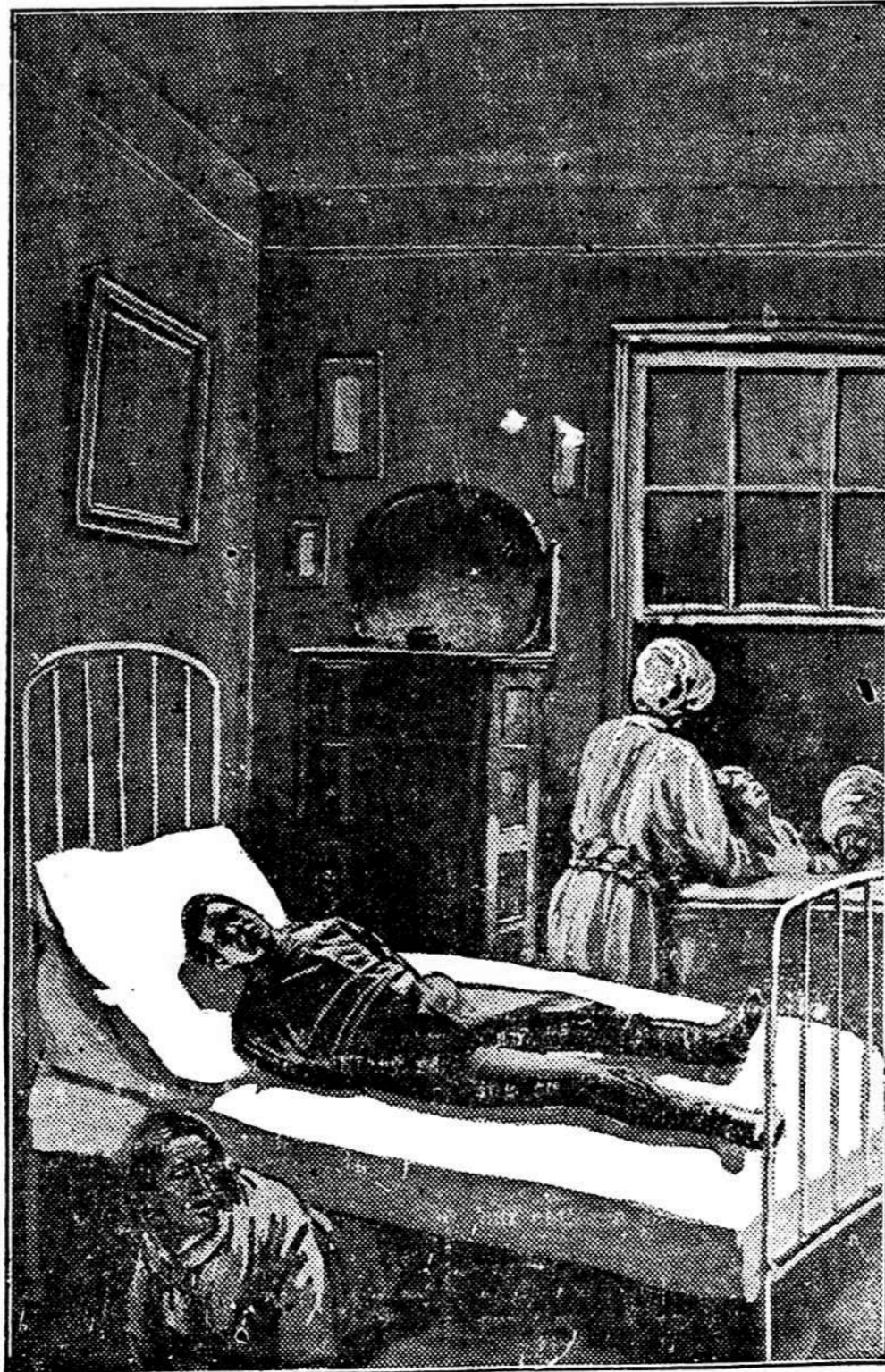
As he ran swiftly down the middle of the deserted street, in the dim light of a curb lamp he saw an object lying on the pavement and stopped to pick it up. It was a handkerchief which he recognized as having belonged to Davis, and thrusting it into his pocket he reduced his pace to a dog trot, carefully scanning the road as he passed. Something further on he saw where a machine had passed through a small bed of mud but a few moments before, and a quick inspection of the wheel tracks fixed their peculiarities in his mind. For one who could track a soft-footed beast through the forest mile after mile, the following of the wet-tired automobile from now on was as simple as though it had run upon rails.

Far ahead of the pursuing Indian the van drew up before a shack in a wooded valley. Its walls were low and a large tree stood close beside it, one strong bough overhanging the pyramidal roof. Before this rude woodland temple of Siva the Hindus prostrated themselves, then carried the unconscious quartet within the house. At the far end of the room stood an image of the god Siva, looking down upon the big stone altar close before him. Upon this place of sacrifice the four were placed, and retiring to the outside the Hindus shut the door and placed brush about the edifice. Shallum lighted it.

"Thou wilt not appear before Siva alone, Oh, Ram Chunder," he said.

In the east the sun was rising and a ray of light, passing through a rift, lighted upon the faces of the victims. One by one they came to life and lifted their heads to see the face of the dead god leaning down upon them. Outside they heard the incantations of the Hindus and a blast of smoke and flame swept over them. Realizing that they were to be burned alive they began to writhe and struggle. Hotter and hotter the breath of the fire swept over them.

(END OF TENTH EPISODE.)



Lowered Them One by One.