

Perils of Thunder Mountain

by ALBERT E. SMITH and CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY
NOVELIZED FROM VITAGRAPH PHOTO PLAY

EPISODE 4.

SYNOPSIS.

John Davis and Hawk Morgan, executors of the estate of John Carr, miner, and joint guardians of his adopted daughter, Ethel, quarrel over the disposition of the profits of the mine. Morgan, unsuspected by Davis, makes several unsuccessful attempts on the life of the latter, diverting suspicion to a mysterious hermit. Morgan summons a villainous accomplice named Spider Bellas. Several of their attempts to kill Davis, so that Morgan can get the gold and the girl, are miraculously frustrated by a mysterious hermit. Davis is bound to the traveler of a saw used for cutting logs.

Bound to the traveler of the saw mill and being slowly but surely conveyed against the whirling buzz saw, knowing that a few seconds more must find his body being severed by the jagged teeth, John Davis fought against terrible death with all the desperation of a powerful and courageous man. Had the fate which stared him in the face been a clean death at the muzzle of a gun, or through a fall over a cliff, he might have resigned himself to it and died then and there. But the thought of being torn in two by the steel teeth of this whirling monster aroused him as nothing in his life had ever done before. Beneath his clothes his muscles swelled like whiplashes as he summoned every inch of his splendid strength into the battle for life.

The saw was but a foot from his body. It would strike him at the breast, pass through him as through a piece of deadwood, leave him severed in halves. Through his mind flashed the vision of Ethel finding him thus—Ethel, the woman he loved! God! He could not endure the thought. He shut his eyes and released his concentrated strength as a steel spring unbends.

Before that terrific effort the cord that had bound his right arm snapped like a rubber band and the arm was free. Quick as thought he threw out his hand and braced it against the beam running across the mill above the whirling blade. Then stiffening his arm until it became as a bar of iron he pitted his strength against that of the traveler.

Had it been a large mill designed for the handling of heavy timber no man's strength could have resisted it. But fortunately for the victim of Morgan's treachery, when old John Carr, the pioneer, had constructed it he had built only with the thought of sawing the lighter stuff that grew upon the mountains. Furthermore the belt which drove the traveler had gone slack with age and no longer gripped the pulley with its former tenacity.

By a titanic effort of which few men would have been capable, the desperate one upon the conveyor so braced himself between his lashings and the beam that had his arm been a crowbar it would have been scarcely less bendable. For an instant the issue of battle between man and machine hung in doubt, then, thanks to the loosened gripping power of the old belt it began slipping around the driving pulley and the movement of the traveler ceased. Yet the instant the strength of the man should give way the spinning belt would again assert itself and the battle would have been useless. The flashing teeth would bury themselves in the helpless body and the end would quickly come. Nor for long could any man, matterless how powerful, hope to hold his own against the tirelessness of the machine. And even now John could feel his strength beginning to run from him as sand streams from an hourglass.

Within the cabin Ethel glanced at her watch, then turned to Rainface. "Mr. Davis promised to be back within half an hour. If he then that length of time has already passed, and still no signs of him. With so many strange things happening I am becoming nervous. Suppose we go and find him."

Silently the old Indian arose and followed her into the open air.

A short distance upon the trail the girl whirled upon her follower.

"Listen. I hear the hum of the sawmill. What business has it to be running?"

"Bad medicine," murmured the old man. "We better hurry heap fast."

Without stopping for further words they broke into a run in the direction of the sound, the girl in the lead.

A minute later she burst open the door of the mill and stood as one transfixed. Before her lay John Davis, bound upon the traveler, his neck muscles swollen from the frightfulness of his exertion; his arm still holding the saw at bay but beginning to tremble as a wind thrummed round. Unable to speak, he turned his eyes toward her in a wild appeal for help.

The wordless call aroused her as though it had been an electric shock. In the wink of an eye she was herself again with every muscle taut as a harpstring. Her glance flew over the mechanism of the machine, and bending she picked up a wooden billet from the floor. Leaping forward she thrust it between the top of the belt, then giving her lever a sudden twist, she threw the belt from the pulley. Relieved of the pull the traveler became an inert thing, and with a long, rasping breath of exhaustion John let his arm fall. The danger was past, but so narrow had been his escape that the

teeth of the saw had torn his clothes. "Thank God!" she cried, as completely nerveless from the shock and suspense of the moment she fell limply upon the traveler beside her bound one, her arm thrown across him as though to further protect him.

Rainface, old and slow of gait, came panting into the room. Taking in what had happened with a glance, he drew the girl away and seated her upon a stool, then whipping out his knife freed Davis and assisted him to arise. Arms outstretched the freed one staggered to his rescuer, dropped upon his knees and took her in his arms, while from a pocket the ever practical Indian drew a small flask and tendered it. Placing it to the girl's lips Davis forced her to drink a few spoonfuls, and revived by the stimulant the color came flowing back to her cheeks. Taking John's face between her palms she looked down to it, the tears mounting to her eyes, while unable to resist the temptation of her lips he drew them to his own, kissing them. With a grunt of approval the Indian averted his head.

"You are not hurt?" she gasped. "I was in time?" He kissed her again. "Yes, dearest. You saved me from a terrible death, and while I do not know how much my life is worth to you, it is yours."

"I should have died, also, had I been too late," she sobbed.

Within the cabin the Hawk and Bellas sat whispering, heads close together. Suddenly they sprang to their feet and stood staring like two men who see a corpse arise. For before them stood Davis, his head still bleeding from the blow of the billet thrown by the Spider. Ethel upon his arm and the old Indian following closely in their tracks.

"By the Seven Devils, how did you—he?" gasped the Hawk as with eyes protruding he gazed upon them. Bridget Wegan entering the room at that moment, seeing the limp form of the girl, rushed to her and drew her to her motherly bosom, petting her, crying "Babby, babby." John, overjoyed by the knowledge of Ethel's love, missed the words that astonished him had forced from the arch plotter's lips and held out his hand to him. Instantly regaining their poise, the baffled pair greeted him heartily.

"Boys," beamed the rescued man as he slipped them on the backs. "Congratulations. I am the happiest man on earth. Miss Ethel loves me—yes, loves me. Twice my life has hung by a thread since I saw you such a short time ago; once by a damnable deadfall which I stumbled beneath, and the second time when I was fighting a buzz saw for my life. I got out from under the tree unscathed, but this girl saved me from being cut in two—and then it happened."

"What happened?" asked the Spider. "The sweetest girl on earth gave me her lips and heart. It was worth a thousand times what I had gone through. It has made me so happy that I am more than grateful that everything has happened just as it has, but from now on life means something to me and I am going to count upon you two friends to help me in my fight against this fur-coated monster who is ever seeking my life."

Morgan, again grasping the other's hand, wrung it warmly. "Depend upon us, John. We must keep together hereafter, and he will find it harder to deal with three than with one." Once for once Davis returned the clasp.

"Together let it be. We will piece together what we can make out from the papers, and after we have given Ethel a chance to rest until tomorrow we will go to work to find the mine."

"That will give Bellas a chance to go to the settlement tomorrow and attend to some matters for me. If you will lend him a horse he will start before daybreak so as to be back tomorrow night."

As the Hawk and Spider left the room they met Rainface on the porch. "Going to get that storm door to tonight?" the former asked. Rainface shook his head.

"Too dark to work now. Me fix him tomorrow." Leaving the Indian behind, the Spider addressed Morgan.

"What do you want me to do in the village tomorrow?" A thin grin crossed Morgan's dark face.

"You don't go to any village tomorrow. Sabe?" With a nod of understanding the Spider said no more.

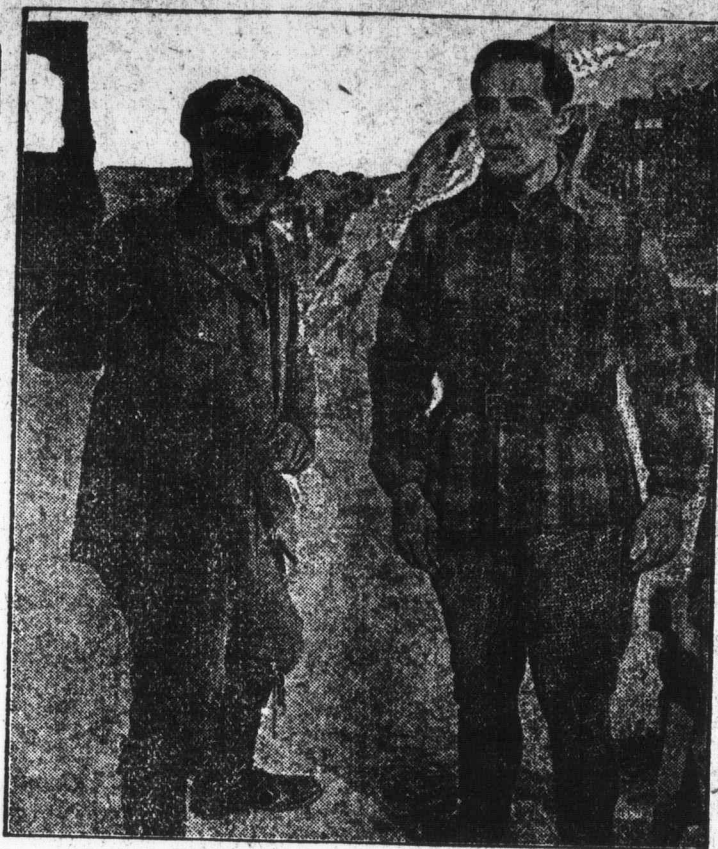
From within Ethel's room, she and John watched the pair depart. Slowly the arm of the man crept around her waist and drew her to him, and with a little sigh of content she let her head fall upon his shoulder.

"Sweetheart—let us be married—now," he pleaded as he bent his head and kissed her. Smiling happily up at him she slowly shook her head.

"No, John, dear, not right away. We must wait until we have carried out Uncle John's plans. Then if you insist—"

"Insist?" he cried, kissing her again. "Then I shall not only insist but demand."

"You will not need to demand," she said, as her hand patted his cheek. Rainface, happening to pass the partly open door, both saw and heard what was going on within. With a



Morgan, Wee of Face, but With a Laugh in His Bosom.

faint smile breaking across his stoic face he entered the kitchen to confront Bridget.

"Young chief and young squaw—they kiss each other in the mill and they get married bimby, mebbys," he announced. The rolling pin dropped from the big Irish woman's floury hands and she held them aloft ecstatically.

"Glory be. 'Tis the fondest wish of me heart," she cried, and careless of her whitened fingers seized the astonished Rainface about his shoulders and broke into a wild Irish jig as she dragged him around the room. Indignantly breaking away from her he backed to the doorway from which he viewed her with great disgust.

"You damn fool woman," he announced. The next instant he was speeding up the trail for dear life with a frying pan clattering at his heels.

The next morning the Spider harnessing up his light buckboard in the early light, took his departure ostensibly for the settlement a dozen miles away. Once out of sight of the cabin, however, he swung sharply at right angles, and concealing his rig in a small ravine choked with bowlders and small trees, sat down to await the coming of his confederate. Some fifteen minutes later Morgan appeared upon the scene, bringing with him a bundle which he deposited upon the ground, then addressed the other.

"When I throw the stick I am whittling past the corner of the house, you act. Wait for that signal. Do you hear?"

"Think I can't understand English?" growled Bellas. "Do your part and I'll do mine." Morgan, striding away, was followed by the eyes of the Spider.

Returning to the cabin Morgan approached the living room door. Rainface was upon the porch, putting the finishing touches to the door upon which he had been working the day before. As finished, the vestibule was about five feet square, with glazed windows on two sides and the storm door on the third. Morgan, as he entered through it, observed that one entering or leaving the vestibule would not be visible from the living room until he was well in front of the living room door. Passing into the house he greeted Ethel and Davis cheerily, and the three sat down to breakfast. Finishing this, Morgan turned to the other man.

"Suppose we have another look at those papers, Davis. I would like to study them a bit." With a nod of assent John arose and took the articles from a desk and handed them to the other man, who still sipping his coffee read them over slowly. Having satisfied himself as to certain points, he arose.

"I am going to see if I can identify a certain point," he announced as he took down a pair of field glasses from the wall. Without further explanation he went outside, calling the attention of Rainface to certain things still remaining to be done to the vestibule, and the Indian picking up his tools, resumed his work. Picking up a piece of wood that had been discarded by Rainface, Morgan drew his knife and carelessly began to whittle it, his head bent and to all appearances deep in thought.

We will now return to the Spider. No soon had Morgan disappeared than Bellas opening the bundle which his confederate had dropped upon the ground beside him, drew forth a lariat, a fur coat and cap, winding the former about his waist and donning the latter two garments. Masking his face with a handkerchief he went creeping stealthily away, approaching the house

upon the side which contained the great stone chimney. Bridget, opening the kitchen door just at that moment to throw out a pan of water, sent him scurrying quick as a squirrel behind this retreat, where gun in hand he stood alert. The shutting of the kitchen door telling him that he had not been observed, he replaced the weapon and peered cautiously around the chimney's edge. Seeing that the coast was clear, he picked up a small stone and tossed it along the side of the house toward its front.

As the pebble rolled along the ground Morgan, who still stood apparently absorbed with the whittling of his stick, flicked a lightning glance from the side of his eye upon the moving object. Closing his knife he pitched the stick alongside the stone, and turning upon his heel re-entered the house where Davis and Ethel were engaged in playing checkers. He addressed Davis.

"Davis, I think I have made a discovery. Come out here and I'll show you." John arose.

"Pardon me a moment, Ethel. It is your move. I'll be back by the time you have made it," said John. Slightly curious as to what the other had found, he followed Morgan.

"Just a little bit this way," said the Hawk as he led the unsuspecting one a short distance from the house.

From his hiding place the Spider had noted the falling of the whittled stick, and at this signal he prepared himself for action. Swiftly uncoiling the rope from around his body he threw it over his shoulder, then seizing the chimney began to climb. Owing to its rough exterior and protruding stones he had little difficulty in reaching its top, and gaining the roof deftly fastened one end of the lariat to the coping, dropping the other end down the yawning opening. Then with a swift glance about to assure himself that he was unobserved, he seized the rope and began lowering himself down the chimney's throat, the great size of the latter affording him ample room.

Hand over hand he went down the dangling length of the lasso until he landed upon the broad hearth with its smoldering coals which his feet over the boots of which he had slipped, a heavy pair of lumberman's stockings, easily avoided. With one glance his eyes swept the room. Ethel, her back turned toward him, was idly toying with the checkers as she awaited the return of the man whom she loved more than all else in the world, totally unconscious of the descent into the room of one who was John Davis' mortal enemy. Seeing that he had not been observed, the Spider with a deft movement thrust the exposed end of the lariat up the chimney and made it fast out of sight, then in his stockinged boots began creeping like the insect for which he was named, upon his prey. Tiptoeing his way, his eyes glued upon her, he advanced silently, his fingers outstretched like talons. When within a yard of her, as though aroused by some subtle sense of impending danger, she arose with a small gasp of fright, but before she could turn or cry aloud, the prowler was upon her. Swinging one arm about her slender body and clapping a hand over her lips, he lifted her from the floor as though she had been a feather and bore her into her own room, closing the door behind them.

Having gotten her here safely out of sight, he threw her upon the bed as with head held high and ears strained he listened for any sound which might indicate that he had been seen or heard. All was silence, and

behind his mask a slow grin of satisfaction asserted itself. Ethel, finding her mouth freed, drew her breath for the cry for help that would bring her friend rushing into the room, but her enemy was too quick for her. Feeling the long intake of her breath and instinctively recognizing what was about to follow, he clutched her by the throat and the cry died unborn. Holding her thus he tore a strip from her pillow and bound it about her lips until all further danger from this source was smothered.

Next taking her own lasso from its hook upon the wall he proceeded to blind her, lashing her round and about as a spider binds a fly in its mesh, and having finished this and made her completely helpless, wrapped her in a blanket. Opening a window and listening and peering until satisfied that the coast was clear, he again raised her in his arms and bore her through the opening.

Picking his way carefully over the well trodden ground, stepping only where others had stepped before him, so as to leave no new trail; treading from bare rock to bare rock he disappeared, leaving no clew which the eye could follow behind him.

But a few minutes later Morgan and Davis, Rainface following, entered the living room of the house. John was speaking.

"Perhaps you are right. Anyway, tomorrow we will try." He glanced about the vacant room. "Where is Ethel?" he demanded sharply.

Frantically rushing about the place they searched it nook and cranny, the cellar, the barn, the outbuildings. No sign of the missing one was to be found. She had vanished as completely as though she had never been born. Sinking upon a chair Davis rested his head in his hand, addressing them in a voice that was dry and hard.

"That damned, infernal scoundrel has come and gone again. And he has taken Ethel with him. There is no use of searching further here, for he has borne her away to some hidden retreat. My God! What shall we do?"

"First you and now she," returned the Hawk huskily. "What is the meaning of it all?" Davis aroused himself. "As for me, well, that didn't matter much. But if he harms a hair of that girl's head I'll cut his heart out and throw it to the wolves."

"And I'll help you with a willing hand," chimed in Morgan, weeping of face but with a laugh in his bosom. John got upon his feet.

"Rainface, you and I must start up the canyon at once, scatter and begin the search. He has had but a short start and it may be that we can overtake him." Quickly the Indian came forward, eager as a hound for the chase, but Morgan pointing to the sobbing Bridget laid his hand upon his cousin's arm.

"Somebody had better stay behind. We have another woman to look after." Instantly Davis agreed.

"Yes, I nearly had forgotten Bridget. She is so capable of taking care of herself under ordinary circumstances that I did not realize how this has unnerved her. By all means you must stay here." Running to the barn John and Rainface hurriedly began saddling their horses.

Bearing the girl bound and gagged to the barn, the Spider laid her upon the floor as he swiftly followed out his plan. Drawn to one corner of the place where it was kept when not in use was the block and tackle which was employed during the haying season for hoisting fodder into the loft above and taking a half hitch of this rope about her body began heaving her toward the top of the barn. Having elevated her to the proper height



Followed the Roar of an Explosion.

he made his end of the rope fast, then clambering up by means of the ladder swung her into the loft where he deposited her upon the hay against the front wall of the barn. Then sinking from the place he regained his horse which he had left hidden in the tiny ravine, and mounting disappeared up the canyon.

A little later he had reached a cave which had burrowed itself into the face of the hills at the base of a cliff

or steep rise from the canyon. Here he dismounted, and uncovering a box of dynamite and detonators which he had previously concealed at the spot, conveyed them within the cave. Skillfully working, he soon had fastened the dynamite upon the roof of the shallow place, then placing the detonator began striding the cord which would operate the trigger along the entrance to the retreat a few inches from the ground. Having finished this and lightly covered the cord with dried moss and leaves, for a moment he contemplated his work with inward satisfaction, then going without mounted his horse and went riding away. Once more using his customary caution, the Spider avoided the regular trail by riding in a parallel course beside it until about half the way back from his devil's nest had been covered. Then drawing one of Ethel's shoes which he had taken from her foot before leaving her in the loft from his pocket, as well as the handkerchief which had been about her neck, he slipped from the saddle.

Grasping the shoe firmly he made its imprint upon fresh snow beside the trail, following the first track with another a few yards further on, both tracks pointing up the trail.

Further on toward the house he dropped her handkerchief, then returned to his horse.

Approaching the barn softly he halted, a moment later being joined by Morgan.

"How is everything?" asked the Hawk guardedly. The Spider laughed softly.

"Just make him think she is in our Devil's Pocket, and when he tries to bust in he'll get his, all right." As quietly as they had come they left.

Within the hay loft Ethel, bound but with her courage unabated, was engaged in a silent struggle against the rope which wound her about. Suddenly in the midst of her wriggles she became quiet as a mouse, pressing her ear against a crack as breathlessly she listened to the low voices which were arising from below. As the words of the Spider reached her hearing and dim understanding of their meaning came to her, she began to roll over the hay toward the opening in the floor through which she had been hoisted. Reaching it, without a moment's hesitation she let her body slip over its edge.

For 20 feet her body shot through space, landing upon the high-piled hay in the manger of her pony "Ladybird," and sending that animal back upon his haunches with a snort of fright. But the cloth had been torn from her mouth by the fall and as she called him by name his struggles to escape ceased and with ears pricked forward he thrust his nose against her begging for the sugar which she daily gave him. Seeing that it was not proffered him as usual he grew impatient and began nipping at the pocket where he knew it was her habit to carry it, until at last his teeth closing upon the knot which fastened the rope he gave it a series of tugs. A moment later the girl felt the coils about her loosen and quickly she shook herself free and leaped into the stall at the pony's side.

"Ladybird!" she cried, giving the brute a swift caress, "tonight, you must carry me as you never have before." Throwing her light saddle upon his back she cinched it, then bridling him sprang into the saddle and went thundering out the door.

Certain that some terrible danger threatened her lover and that every second was priceless, she went riding recklessly along the side of the ridge, paying no attention to the roundabout trail but leaping bowlders and crashing through the brush as a deer goes when pursued by wolves. Reaching the entrance to the pocket with its infernal contrivance, she slid from the saddle and went running toward its mouth.

Davis, having found the handkerchief and tracks made by the Spider came hastening anxiously along just in time to see her dart toward the dark mouth of the cavern. Not knowing what she was about to do but instantly scenting danger he called to her to stop, but his voice did not reach her and she sped on with undiminished speed. The next instant her foot struck the trip line which released the trigger.

Followed the roar of an explosion from within and a downpour of rocks. Struck upon the head by one of them she fell forward upon her face in the midst of a deluge of released stones and debris. With a terrible cry of anguish and fear Davis leaped to after her, just as a great bowlder shaken from its bed began to slowly descend straight above her prostrate form.

Then ensued a struggle to the finish between the man and elemental force. Throwing up his hands as did Porthos in the Grotto of Loc Maria, John made a lying pillar of himself, as the great weight settled upon his shoulders. Rigid as an iron statue, his muscles bulging beneath the terrific strain for a minute he held it at bay, then slowly but surely the mountain conquered and he bent backward and down, the falling stones covering him; bidding him from sight.

(END OF FOURTH EPISODE.)