

PERILS of THUNDER MOUNTAIN

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EPISODE 2.

SYNOPSIS.

John Carr, miner, commits suicide. His will directs his nephews, John Davis and Hawk Morgan, to work his gold mine and names them as joint guardians of his adopted daughter, Ethel. He specifies that certain sums shall be paid to Ethel, his nephews and two servants and that the remaining profits shall be used for the benefit of the John Carr Foundation for the support of war widows and orphans. Morgan proposes disregarding the latter clause and dividing the profits. He quarrels with Davis over the proposition and later attempts his life.

Morgan, on the roof of the lean-to, again thrusts with his lance at the breast of the prostrate John upon his bunk below. Again the point of the great bowie knife just grazed him as John, by a desperate twist of his arm, diverted it, allowing it to plunge itself into the mattress upon which he lay.

Just as the knife buried itself in the mattress it was violently swayed sidewise and stood there quivering, as though the long rake handle to which it was strapped had been released by the hands which had held it from above.

As Morgan upon the roof made his last shove with the lance at the one below whom he was endeavoring to slay, from out of the darkness a larriat came whistling and tightened over his shoulders as he knelt there. From the ground there came a vicious jerk



Closed With His Treacherous Enemy.

upon the rope, and the would-be assassin came tumbling to the earth, where he lay stunned in a drift of snow.

Within the lean-to Davis, now that the attack upon him had ceased, quickly threw off the entangling blanket and got upon his feet. Then pulling on his boots he picked up his gun, rushed to a low window and threw it open.

Through the darkness he obtained a momentary glance of a rapidly vanishing human figure as it sped up the mountain side. The window from which he looked was upon the side of the lean-to, while the senseless Hawk Morgan was lying across the end. Pausing only long enough to fix the picture of the fleeing man in his mind, John leaped through the window and started in hot pursuit.

Morgan regaining his senses just at this moment slowly raised himself to a sitting posture in the drift. The cold air and snow had swept the fog of insensibility from his brain and for a few seconds he remained silently watching the figure of John as it was swallowed up by the darkness. Then arising he threw off the larriat that had caused him his tumble and once more scrambled to the lean-to's top. From here he pulled out the lance, released the roof board and tossing the lance toward the barn sprang to the ground and started in pursuit of Davis.

Taking a short cut which he had noticed that afternoon, Hawk gained rapidly upon the one he was pursuing, the result being that presently he was close upon the other's heels. It quickly became apparent that the strange figure which was in the lead knew the mountain side perfectly, for despite the strenuous endeavors of Davis the other man a little more than held his own in the flight. It was but a few moments later that the stranger gained the summit of the ridge, where for a fleeting instant he was outlined against the sky, then, with a leap he vanished. In that second when he had been revealed clearly Davis had raised his gun, but before he could pull the trigger the leap and disappearance had come and the weapon fell unused to his side.

He thrust the pistol back into his belt and once again pressed on, closely followed by the Hawk. He reached the summit of the ridge and looked about but no one was in sight. And in that moment the Hawk, creeping up on him from behind, gave him a violent push. With a cry and a futile upfling of his arms, John reeled and disappeared even as suddenly as had the one who had preceded him.

For an instant Hawk Morgan stood upon the brow of the cliff and looked

down the dizzy descent where his victim had disappeared, then with a brutal laugh he turned and began his descent to the cabin.

Arriving at the place where he had been tumbled unconscious in the drift he picked up the lance from the place where he had cast it and hastily entered the barn. Passing into the harness room he unbound the bowie-knife from the handle of the rake, tossed the handle aside and restored the deadly blade to its sheath upon the wall.

Then with a sweep of his hand he removed the bandana handkerchief which had concealed his face, after which he took off the fur coat of the old prospector, Carr, and once more stood revealed clad in his own apparel.

Within the living room of the cabin Rainface, still lay sleeping upon the floor by the fireplace. Well advanced in years and wrinkled as the palm of one's hand, he slept profoundly, a light covering over him. Through the window in the lean-to out of which John Davis had leaped in his pursuit of the fleeing stranger a strong draft of the cold mountain air came rushing, creeping beneath the crack between the loosely fitting door and floor of the room. At once the temperature of the inner room became sensibly reduced, and as the chill fell upon Rainface he drew his light blanket closer in his sleep, grew quiet again for a moment, then slowly awoke and sat up. As his keen old eyes roved about the room they apparently alighted upon something that aroused his suspicion, for arising silently he passed to the door leading into the lean-to, listened, knocked gently, then as there was no response he turned the knob and pushed the door ajar.

Cautiously he scanned the interior. Nobody was there and entering he crossed the room and peered out of the open window. Once more nothing unusual met his gaze.

Without it was both snowing and blowing and through the flying flakes he saw no disturbance of the snow which spread the ground. Wondering what had become of Davis he came back into the living room, closing the door of the lean-to behind him and approached the door of the room in which Ethel slept. For a moment he hesitated, then raised his hand and knocked.

Half a mile away from the cabin and high up in the face of a cliff, screened from observation above by a big overhang and also sheltered from sight from the other side by a lip of ragged rock, a small cave had burrowed itself into the side of the mountain. From a tiny ledge of rock where it had been placed, a lantern cast its yellow flood of light over the stone walls and floor of the place. Standing in the center of the room was a man who was smooth shaven, wrinkled and old; the sole occupant of this hidden retreat; the Recluse of Mystery Mountain.

As he stood panting from his efforts of the run and after detaching the rope by which he had gained this place after escaping from Davis his eyes chanced to glance from the entrance and to the side of the precipitous descent close at hand, and an involuntary gasp escaped him. For down the side of rock the body of a man was plunging in a fall that seemed must result in certain death.

Throwing his rope in a swift turn about a jutting piece of rock, he grasped both ends firmly and began letting himself down. Reaching a place where he could secure footing he released the end of the rope that he had been paying out, and drawing it to him threw it in loose loops over his arm. Then running to the edge of the ledge upon which he had found a foothold he looked down just in time to see John bringing up in a small avalanche of snow.

Swiftly the Hermit acted. Again making his rope fast he lowered himself to the pile of snow and approaching the prostrate form bent over it. Faint signs of life were visible, and taking a hitch around the silent figure he climbed back to the mouth of his cave and began hauling the limp form up. It was a difficult task and few men could have performed it, but the arms of the old Hermit of the Mountain were like bars of iron, and foot by foot the burden arose. At the end of several minutes of severe labor, the limp form was deposited upon the floor of the cave.

Again bending over the one whom he had elevated to this place the old Hermit carefully examined him. The heart was still beating and the breath of life was parting on his lips. No bones seemed to be broken, and after a brief examination the Hermit straightened himself up.

"He isn't going to die," he murmured. "He is young and tough as a hickory knot. He probably hit his head against something in that tumble and for the time being is knocked out. But he will come out of it all right."

For a moment he stood looking

down at the other silently, then spoke aloud again in the low tones of one who has long lived in great solitudes.

"I ain't certain just how he is going to take this when he comes to, so I guess I'd better be on the safe side. He is liable to start in being rough if he has a chance, therefore I'll truss him up for the time being until I can find out how he wants to act. Might as well tie a handkerchief over his face, too, in case he should be a mite curious or want to start trouble."

Hoisting the still motionless one upon his back, he started down a small tunnel which evidently had been blasted from the rear of the cave.

Back in the living room of the cabin Rainface, knocking at the door of Ethel's room, listened a moment for a response from within. None came and for a second time his knuckles fell upon the panel. Hearing him this time the girl listened, sat up in her bed and then called out demanding to know who was there. The voice of the old Indian came faintly through the door.

"Me, Rainface, knock. Young chief—he gone."

With a little cry Ethel sprang from the bed. Thrusting her feet into her slippers, she drew on a wrap and throwing the door ajar breathlessly asked what had happened. Silently he led to the lean-to, opened the door and pointed at the bed. Then still unspeaking but indicating by motions that the window had been open he stood immobile as he watched her face. Greatly alarmed and wholly puzzled at the mystery of it all, the girl stepped back into the living room and opened the outside door. A flurry of snow struck her in the face.

She turned to Rainface. "Fire your gun. That will bring Mr. Morgan, and maybe Mr. Davis is with him."

With a nod the Indian drew his weapon and fired twice into the night.

Within the harness room Morgan, hearing the reports and knowing that the alarm was raised, smiled grimly as he drew on his coat. Leaving it unopened as though he had responded with the greatest of haste, he rushed out in the direction of the cabin, throwing open the door and entering.

"What is the matter? I heard the shots and came as quickly as I could," he exclaimed as he looked into the agitated face of the girl. Quickly she approached him.

"Mr. Davis is gone. Wasn't he with you? Haven't you seen him?" As he was about to reply a sound as of a stone thrown against the door caused them to wheel with a start. For an instant they stood looking into each other's face, then striding to the door Morgan threw it open, and the form of Davis tumbled heavily into the room. Quickly Morgan and Rainface grasped him, and closing the door laid him on a robe before the fire. Clapping her hands in her anxiety Ethel bent over him, while Rainface severed the bonds by which the Hermit had bound him before he had brought him there and hurled the stone against the building. Bridget, awakened by the commotion,



Broke Beneath His Weight.

came rushing into the room, her hair in curl papers and a blanket thrown about her, while Rainface, acting upon the orders of Morgan, brought a bottle of whisky from a locker and pressed it to Davis' lips. Revived by the stimulant, the patient sat up.

"Tell us what happened to you," cried Ethel as the victim of the Hawk's treachery was once more able to speak. He shook his head.

"It is almost as much of a mystery to me as it can be to you. I found myself attacked in the night by someone who was trying to spear me from the roof of the lean-to. Somehow I managed to save myself, then as the attack ceased, I jumped from the bunk and looked out of the window. I saw a figure fleeing up the mountain and pursued it. All at once it vanished over a cliff, and as I stood there wondering, something thrust me violently from behind. I fell and knew nothing more until I opened my eyes here."

Morgan, listening, said nothing until the other finished, then lighted a cigarette. "You must have had a bad dream, old man, and walked in your sleep until you fell over the cliff," he said cynically. Davis turned upon him. "It was nothing of the kind, Hawk Morgan. If that were so, how did I manage to tie myself up and bring myself here?"

"Wish I knew," returned the other, for once truthful. He looked at his watch. "Seven o'clock. I'll go and wash myself for breakfast." Out he went leaving them to puzzle out the strange occurrence.

Breakfast finished, Rainface hitched a sleigh to take Bridget to the settlement to restock her larder. As they were departing Morgan gave the Indian a letter with instruction to post it, and as they disappeared down the trail he re-entered the harness room.

Taking a bow, from the wall he strung it, tested it, then picked up an arrow with a long, keen edge. Drawing it to the head he sent it whizzing across the room, where it buried itself for several inches in the wood. He withdrew it, looking at the hole it had made with satisfaction.

"Bows make no noise, and arrows do the work as well as bullets," he murmured as he again began donning his disguise of the handkerchief and fur coat. Leaving the harness room he crept cautiously to the window of the living room and peered within. Davis was bent over a table writing, his back to the prowl, and satisfied with what he saw Hawk stepped to the kitchen window. A quick glance showed him Ethel within, putting the final polishing touches upon a shining aluminum frying pan. So bright was the dish that she was holding it before her face and smiling at the reflection which she saw within it, and satisfied that she had not observed him the man sneaked back to the window of the living room. Silently sliding the window a short distance aside he fixed the notch of the arrow to the string and bent the bow, his cold eyes fastened upon the unsuspecting one at the table.

As the arrow head pointed itself at the middle of Davis' back, Ethel, wholly unaware of what was taking place quietly entered the room with the shining pan. Seeing John at the table absorbed in his writing, and suddenly possessed with the mischievous idea of thrusting the pan between his face and the paper so that he would unexpectedly be confronted by his own image, she advanced daintily on tiptoe toward him, the utensil thrust out.

Close behind the back of Davis, from the side of her eye she caught a glimpse of the man at the window with the drawn bow and deadly arrow point aimed with murderous intent. Quick as a flash she leaped forward with the intention of interposing her own body between the point and the unsuspecting one, and as she did so Hawk loosed the shaft. Whizzing, it sped upon its errand, encountering the outthrust metal pan and piercing it to half the length of the long head.

Aroused by the involuntary cry of the girl Davis sprang to his feet just in time to catch Ethel, as overcome by the shock of it all, she fell forward unconscious in his arms. Morgan, seeing that his design had failed, threw his coat and bow aside, and whipping the handkerchief from his face, drew his pistol and deliberately fired a shot at his own forearm, then two more into the air. Then running around the house he once more appeared before the front door where he picked up the bow and coat, and with a face apparently much worried, burst into the room where Davis was still supporting the girl.

"Are you all safe?" he demanded quickly. Davis nodded. "Yes, why? What happened?" The Hawk drew a long breath. "I saw a man, face covered by a handkerchief, standing at that window drawing a bow. Just as he let go I fired. He dropped the bow, whipped out a gun and returned the shot. Then he ran. I fired, but he got away leaving the coat and bow." He held out his left arm with a laugh. "He just raked my arm, but it doesn't amount to much." The girl gave a cry.

"I'll heal it for you. But that coat and bow—one belonged to Uncle and the other to Rainface. They were kept in the harness room."

"Somebody must have stolen them in my absence," said Morgan coolly. "You and I had better stick together. Davis. Maybe it was the mysterious stranger of last night."

"Yes," responded John very soberly. "It looks as though we might need each other's help."

That afternoon when John and Ethel were in the stable looking at the horses, Morgan crept into the cellar beneath the cabin. Examining the ceiling his eye alighted upon a knot hole in the floor, and carefully he noted its location. Then drawing a

short and heavy automatic he thrust the barrel into the hole, aimed it carefully at a given point in the room above, then wedged it fast in place. Then tying a stout cord to the trigger he ran it along the ceiling toward the front of the house and forced it through the front wall. Running as it did along the cellar ceiling and up the slanting door, it was not visible to anyone coming back from the stable or barn.

Entering the cabin the Hawk examined the place of the knot hole in the floor, carefully calculated the direction which the bullet would take, then placed a table and chair where



Encountered the Outthrust Metal Pan.

they would be in direct range. As Ethel and John came back from the stable he addressed the latter in a friendly voice.

"Suppose you draw up some simple articles of agreement as to how we shall work the mine when we find it, Davis."

"All right responded the one addressed. Going to the table which had been placed in range by the plotter he seated himself and began writing. Morgan, pointing down the canyon at an imaginary object, thus diverted the attention of the girl while he grasped the string. The next instant there was a flash, a roar and a cloud of smoke.

Startled by the explosion so close behind her, Ethel turned upon the instant to see Davis pitching forward out of his chair and falling hands outstretched upon the floor. With a cry she rushed by Morgan and ran toward the prostrate and unconscious man, the Hawk close following on her heels. Together they lifted John up. Across the side of his head was the track of a bullet where it had plowed its way, grazing his temple and stunning him. Owing to the fact that the injured man had turned his head to look at the pair just at the instant that the shot was fired, the bullet merely had missed his brain. Pausing only long enough to see that his plot had again failed, the Hawk left his would-be victim to the ministrations of the girl and hurrying to the cellar removed the pistol, concealed the line and went back to meet Rainface and Bridget Wegan.

"It was another dastardly attempt on his life by the mysterious stranger," explained Morgan with an assumption of great indignation. Pointing to the hole in the floor he told them that the shot had come through it, and turned to Davis.

"Two attempts on your life and one on mine," he said. "We cannot let this thing go on. Suppose we go and search the vicinity?"

"He must have a cup of tea first to brace him up after this," insisted the kindly hearted Irish woman, and Morgan agreed.

Leaving John for his cup of refreshing brew the Hawk approached the barn. As he did so a man came sliding down the hillside, bringing up at his feet in a cloud of snow. Instantly Morgan whipped out his pistol, but in the act of firing stayed his finger as he saw who the newcomer was.

"Spider Bellas!" he exclaimed, as he replaced the weapon. "You made good time in coming." The Spider grinned.

"Yes, I got yer telegram. I could have come up with the Indian and the Biddy, but I thought I'd better take a horse and the trail on the other side of the mountain. Well, now I'm here, and what do you want of me?"

Quickly Morgan explained his plan, ending by saying:

"As soon as Davis gets across, show yourself and lead him on. Don't let him catch you. Just give me time to fix the thing up, then make a circle and meet me here tonight. Get me?"

With a nod the Spider turned and went up the canyon. Providing himself with snowshoes and a small shovel and saw which he concealed beneath his coat, Morgan met Davis at the door. He addressed the other.

"Suppose we keep together until we

have crossed the gap, then I'll take the ridge while you go up the valley. We must time ourselves so as to get back before dark."

"All right," assented Davis, and side by side they started off.

Along the mountainside they went until they reached a ravine which was of considerable depth save at one point where an overhanging shoulder of the rock met a somewhat similar jut on the other side. At this point the gap was narrowed to a distance which could be bridged by a fallen tree, and in fact as they arrived upon its edge they saw that a prostrate pine, of a size that would easily bear the weight of a man, traversed it from edge to edge. They paused before it, scanning it with care.

"It will take us over easily enough," laughed the Hawk. "However, you had better let me go ahead so if anything should happen it would be instead of you that took the tumble."

"Mighty decent of you, Morgan, but I don't want anybody to take any risk on my account," returned Davis. But pushing the other good-naturedly aside the plotter mounted the trunk and balancing himself with his arms, crossed in safety. John followed him with equal ease.

Upon the other side they separated, Morgan going up the ridge at the left and John pursuing his way straight on and keenly surveying the landscape about. He had accomplished but a short distance when he saw the form of Spider Bellas standing beside a tree, and suspicious that this might be the unknown stranger who was plotting against his life, John drew his gun and ordered him to throw up his hands. But darting behind the tree like a weasel the Spider darted away, with John in hot pursuit.

Barely waiting until John was out of sight the Hawk returned to the tree. Hastily drawing his small shovel and saw from their places of concealment he fell to work upon a plan that promised to forever rid the world of the rival whom he hated with all the rat's soul. For ten minutes he worked with desperate energy, then with his task finished to his satisfaction he covered all traces of his efforts with snow and taking his place behind a tree sat down to watch the end of the man whose existence bid fair to thwart his evil designs.

Darting amongst the trees with surprising swiftness of foot, the Spider was upon the point of eluding the pursuing Davis when he stumbled and fell headlong. Close before him was a rift deep and steep, and in the very act of being precipitated down it where he would have fallen a mangled corpse almost at the foot of his waiting confederate. The hand of John leaped forward and dragged the other to his feet and safety.

"Who are you?" he demanded as they faced each other.

The reply of the one who had just been saved from death was a blow in the face. Taken wholly by surprise, the rescuer was nearly knocked from his feet, but quickly recovering his balance closed with his treacherous enemy. Still partially dazed by the blow John fought fiercely, but the other securing a favorable hold threw him heavily. For a moment they rolled upon the edge of the descent. Then John having regained his strength lifted his toe in his arms and hurled him over the edge. Breathless from his efforts the victor stood looking at the place where the other had disappeared.

Seeing that the other had vanished from the scene, John glanced about. It was growing dark and remembering that he was to meet Morgan before night fell he retraced his steps to the fallen pine. As he reached it the Hawk arose from his seat and welcomed him.

"Better hurry or we will be caught out here in the mountains after dark," he warned, and with a nod the unsuspecting one stepped upon the now nearly sawed through tree. He had taken but a few steps, when a warning crack startled him, and with the trunk slowly bending beneath his weight he turned in a desperate effort to again reach terra firma. But before he could regain it the treacherously cut support gave way and the trunk began rushing down. Knowing that to fall with it meant death, John leaped sideways into an overhanging tree. Clutching wildly at the branches as he sought to stay his fall, he found good fortune he finally checked himself and brought up hanging to a limb by one arm. Slowly, painfully he braced the supporting branch with his other hand and began to draw himself upward.

From the opposite side of the gap the Hawk saw that his victim was about to save himself, and drawing his revolver leveled it at the clinging man.

There was a flash and a roar, and the trail bough cut by the bullet broke beneath the weight of the one who was hanging from it.

Like a falling rocket John plunged downward.

(END OF SECOND EPISODE.)