

Perils of Thunder Mountain

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EPISODE I

On every side the great snow-capped mountains of the range thrust their heads far into the swamping reaches of the sky. As far as the eye could reach jumbled masses of beetling cliffs and gleaming domes arose in height above height like the inconceivably vast waves of a sea. Between these monsters of the range lay canyons that the rays of sunlight never reached the bottom of. And it was in one of these secret hiding places of Nature that there lay veins of rich, yellow ore of a richness to cause the beholder to blink his eyes and his heart to give a great jump when he first contemplated it.

Such was the secret treasure place found by Old John Carr, lifetime prospector and miner. In the closing days of his life, and known to no living man but him. Above the brink of a precipitous cliff whose walls fell sheer away into dizzy depths, the fur-capped head of a man with a long silver beard slowly arose. Assisting himself up by means of an alpenstock he clambered above the brink and stood upon its edge, tall and straight, a rugged specimen of the fearless tribe that ever has forced its way into the most secret places of nature.

For a full minute he stood straight and sharp cut as a statue outlined against the sky as he ran his eyes slowly over the wide spreading panorama that lay before him. The country was without habitation, not even the smoke of a distant fire being visible, except in one place. This came from a valley in which there stood a substantial log cabin with a huge stone chimney at one end.

This cabin nestled far below and not a great ways from the crest of the big ridge, or summit of the peak. Close by were sheds and stables for horses, a corral adjoining them. John Carr, pioneer in this wilderness, was paying them a silent farewell.

The sun climbing the eastern sky bathed him in a flood of golden light. He took his alpenstock and thrust it firmly into the rocks so that it stood upright, then fastened his red bandana handkerchief to it after the manner of a flag. Next taking from the breast pocket of his fur bordered mackinaw a letter, he fastened it to the base of the staff. As the alpenstock now stood with the red cloth waving from its top in the mountain breeze, it was an object which could be seen for a long distance. Once more, he turned his face to the scene below.

From out of the corral an Indian came strolling and passed into the house, while the rough hand of the old miner for an instant swept itself across his face.

"There never was a better Injun than Rainface," he murmured. Then turning suddenly he leaped straight out into the air and downward beyond the ridge. Thus it was that John Carr departed from the scene which had known him for so many years.

Within the cabin far below Rainface was putting logs upon the fire.

From an adjoining room where they had just finished their breakfast John Davis and Ethel Carr emerged. The man was tall and powerfully built, dressed in winter outing costume, while the girl wore Indian leggings and a short home-made jacket trimmed with fur. The adopted daughter of John Carr, Ethel had been brought up in the mountains almost as uncontrolled as the creatures of the ravines themselves. Her hair falling down her back, was plaited, Indian fashion, and fastened with a bow. Although she was 18 years of age, in her youthful dress she looked far younger.

"It is hard to learn to eat like one of your ladies of the cities, where they think they are so nice," she protested with a little pout. "You are always scolding me because I don't use a fork when a spoon or knife is so much more convenient. I wish you would let me eat the way I want to." John smiled.

"You will get used to it soon enough. And remember that you soon have got to take your place among the other ladies of the world." From the kitchen came the generously proportioned figure of Bridget Wegan, middle aged, cheerful of face, motherly. Reproachingly she turned upon Davis.

"Oh, have the poor baby alone, Mister Davis. Sure what matter does it make if one uses a spade or a hoe so long as the ditch is dug. And if a body gets the vittles into one's mouth, small matter how they get them there. 'Tis a little thing to worry about, is it not, Rainface?" The Indian granted.

"Fingers plenty good enough for me," he returned solemnly.

Still smiling Davis took down a pair of snowshoes from the wall, while the girl followed his example. Drawing on his gloves he turned upon his companions.

"Anyway we'll have our last day on the snow. Where do you suppose Uncle John is, Rainface?" The one addressed shook his head.

"Me not know. But when master go away with the sun sometime he come back with the stars. If he not come pretty soon, me go find him." Bridget once more entering from the

kitchen, thrust a well-filled rucksack into his hand.

"Now on your way the two of ye, and don't come back to bother me. You'll be glad enough to eat this with your ten fingers before the day is over, for niver a spoon or fork did I bother to put up with the vittles." Playfully she shoved them out upon the snow.

Running ahead of him lightly as a rabbit, Ethel shouted back her challenge to the laboring man.

"You may know more about knives and forks than I do, Mister, but I dare you to race me upon snowshoes." At once he accepted the def, only the next moment to find himself floundering upon his face in the white smother.

She led the way a few yards in advance of him, skimming over the shimmering surface with the lightness of a wind-blown leaf, at last vanishing into a cluster of somber spruce with a defiant wave of her hand. Clumsily Davis passed on in pursuit, gaining confidence and speed as he progressed. Yet so good a start of him did she have that when he entered the thick growth she had mysteriously disappeared. Perplexedly he stared about.

From half a dozen yards away the girl, crouching behind a boulder, watched him as amusement spread over her face. Then suddenly reaching down she gathered up a handful of the snow, pressed it into a ball and threw it. Fairly upon the side of his fur cap it struck him and burst, powdering his cheek with its virgin whiteness. He cast his glance about.

"Come out," he dared her.

Through the stillness of the mountain air her voice came tauntingly.

"You may know more about knives and forks than I do, but there are other things in this world. Is it possible that you do not even know how to follow a trail in the snow?"

Ethel provoked that he had not thought of so simple a thing, John directed his eyes to the tell-tale surface. Close at hand lay the blurred signature of her broad clad feet, leading unerringly to her hiding place. He sprang forward, scooping up a handful of the snow as he ran.

"For that, Miss Impudence, I'm going to wash your face."

Five minutes later, despite his awkwardness upon his laced footgear, he had tired her out, caught her, held her prisoner. Half laughing, half crying, she struggled in his arms as he prepared to carry out his threat. Entreatingly her face turned itself to his.

"I didn't mean it—please don't," she gasped. His hand dropped.

"Very well," he returned gravely.

"For this once you are pardoned."

Noon found them deep in a canyon through which a stream came roaring down from the great peaks. From a dead tree the man cut the smaller branches, piling them high and building a roaring blaze. From the rucksack he dragged the coffee pot and thrust it into the coals, while she held a frying pan and slice of bacon aloft.

"A fish to go with the bacon," she laughed.

From the pocket of her jacket she drew a line and hook, while he with his small woodsman's ax lopped off a slender pole. Baiting her hook she cast it into a pool beneath a rock; the next instant her voice arising excitedly.

"I've got a whopper. Come quick—quick and help me."

He looked up from the fire which he had been renewing just in time to see her slip and go sliding toward the stream. Frantically he grasped at her, but quick as he had been he was too late and with a despairing cry she threw up her hands and disappeared in the rushing flood.

At the imminent risk of his life he darted down the edge of the stream, slipping, sliding, his eyes glued upon her body as it was swirled on. Close before them was the brink of a cataract, and well he knew that unless he could grasp her before she reached it she would be torn to fragments by the sharp fangs of rock that lay below. With a reckless leap he landed upon a boulder that stood at the very crest of the wildly downplunging torrent and thrust forth his hand. By great good fortune his fingers closed upon her arm, and bracing his feet in a crevice he dragged her half drowned from the stream. For a moment she lay weakly gasping in his arms.

"Hurt?" he cried as he wiped the water from her face. She struggled faintly, escaped his arms and stood upon her feet.

"And just to think I never let go of that line," she said as she began pulling it in. The next instant a trout was flopping at their feet.

Full of admiration he gazed upon her.

"You are as game as they make them," he said seriously. Her hand fell upon his sleeve.

"Anyway, I owe you my life. It was magnificent the way you pulled me out. I had no idea you were so strong." Afternoon found them drying one the worse for their experiences, approaching the cabin together. Before the door

Rainface, coming from the corral, stopped them.

"I am going to meet Master," he said. Without giving them a chance to reply he hurried on his way.

Within the cabin Bridget confronted them, arms akimbo.

"And what is the meaning of this?" she demanded as her sharp eyes ran them up and down, their wrinkled clothing telling all too plainly the story of their ducking. "Miss Ethel, 'tis me that's askin' what ye have been up to." The girl's arm stole around the ample waist.

"I fell in, Bridget, and he pulled me out. Otherwise I should have gone over the falls."

"I told Rainface that the pair of ye would get into some divilment," she said with a disapproving sniff. "Suddenly the door was thrown open and Rainface stood before them."

"Master no come. See the flag," he said as he pointed to the alpenstock upon the mountain side high above.

"You and me must go and see." Side by side they toiled up the steep ascent. John, leading, picked up the letter which lay at the foot of the staff, and tearing it open read:

"And so having lived long on this mountain I am going to try another life. I leave dear Ethel and what I have to you, John, and your cousin Hawk Morgan. When you are together in the cabin my faithful Rainface will give you my papers. You will then know what to do. God bless you—and farewell. Your uncle, John Carr."

Silently, he and the Indian strode to the edge of the abyss and looked down. Far below them a pair of wolves were sneaking away from a dark object that lay upon the snow, and still without words they began scrambling down the almost sheer descent. Fifteen minutes later they stood before torn clothing, a gun, a cap and other scattered things. Wolf tracks were everywhere. They uncovered their heads.

They retraced their steps to the cabin and entered. Their looks told the gressome story. With a little cry Ethel ran to John and turned her face upon his shoulder. Gently his arms stole about her.

"And you are going to leave me—now after this dreadful thing has happened?" she asked at length when he had told her all. He nodded.

"I must go tonight. It was John Carr's last wish that I find Hawk Morgan and bring him back here for the reading of the will. These good friends will take care of you, child, until I return." Kissing her lightly upon the brow he turned away.

John Davis, knowing but little of his cousin Hawk Morgan, found him in San Francisco. Drawing him aside from the gambling table at which he had almost lost his last dollar briefly he told him the conditions of John Carr's death. The face of Morgan lit with an evil grin.

"And you don't know what the terms of the will are, or whether he had anything to leave?" John shook his head.

"No. I had not seen him for years until he sent for me to visit him a week ago. He said he wrote you at the same time."

"I never got the letter," growled Morgan. "Meet my friend, generally and popularly known as Spider Bellax." Disapprovingly Davis looked into the ill-favored face of the man who stood before him.

"All I know about the matter is that John Carr left you, Hawk Morgan, and me joint guardians as it were of a little girl." Morgan uttered a brutal laugh.

"Good God! I wash my hands of that part of the inheritance at least. I don't want to be saddled with any female critter—of that age anyway."

But I suppose we have got to go back together and find out what it is all about." Suspicious, already disliking each other, they left the place.

Rainface, entering the cabin, found Ethel sitting moodily upon a couch. A week had gone by, a week without word of Davis and worry had haunted her like an evil spirit. Without speaking the Indian pointed down the trail, and with her heart leaping like a bounded ball she arose and rushed to the door.

"He is coming back. Do you suppose he will like me as well—dressed in this?" For the first time she had taken her hair from its long braid, and gone, too, were the moccasins and leggings. The simple skirt that now came to the top of her neat shoes was that of a woman of the cities; her whole costume and manner wonderfully transformed from the girl of the wilderness to the woman of civilization." Bridget drew back in wonderment.

"The man who wouldn't be after loving a woman like you would not be a man at all, at all, but a haythen without soul or red blood in his veins," she said admiringly. Morgan, throwing open the door, stood gazing first at her and then at the closely following John.

"I thought you said she was a little girl," he laughed.

"I was a little girl when he knew me, but trouble has made me a woman," was her reply. The bold eyes of Morgan devoured her.

"And a blamed fine one at that. Here, come and kiss your guardian."

"If I did not let him kiss me, what right have you to expect such a thing?" she demanded. With an exclamation of disgust John took Morgan by the arm.

"I'd wait a while before proposing such a thing, if I were you," he said sternly.

"Supper," announced Bridget from the other room. Hungry from the journey of the day in the mountain air, Hawk turned from the girl.

"All good things in their time, and supper for us now," he announced.

They finished eating and gathered about the table of the living room, wondering what the last words of John Carr might be. Rainface, producing the will and plan, handed them to Davis and the latter, spreading the map upon the table, began to read from the other paper.

"My Last Will and Testament," it began. Eagerly they bent forward. "—therefore my said nephews John Davis and Hawk Morgan are directed to work said mine. After setting apart ten per cent to each of them, and a like amount to my adopted daughter, Ethel Carr, of whom they are made joint guardians, and five per cent for the maintenance of my faithful servants the Indian Rainface and Bridget Wegan. All the other profits are to be devoted to the use and benefit of the John Carr Foundation for the support and assistance of war widows and orphans according to the plan herewith marked exhibit 'A,' and furthermore it is my wish that in case of the death of one administrator, the other succeeds to the double duty of trust and guardianship with double the revenue to himself."

Silently they sat looking into each other's face as the full meaning of the words branded themselves upon their minds, then with a muttered imprecation Morgan bade Bridget take the girl away. Morgan leered after their retreating forms.

"Damn fine girl. I wouldn't mind having her along with my share of the legacy." Ignoring John's look of contempt he went on:

"Of course we won't pay any attention to that widows' and orphans' rot in the will. We'll work the mine, take all for ourselves and fight, play or draw for the girl." Rainface, who had

been sitting stolidly in a corner beside the fireplace, raised his head after the manner of a mountain lion that is awakened from his sleep. Coldly John made his reply.

"I cannot believe that you mean what you have said. The wishes of Uncle John must and shall be carried out. As for Miss Ethel, we'll let her choose between us if she wishes either one." Hawk Morgan closed his fists.

"All right. If you want to quarrel over it you will have plenty of chance. I wanted to get along quietly with you, but if that don't suit you we will make it war to the knife."

"Go as far as you like," returned John icily.

Rainface, though he had said nothing, had not been idle. From the long braid of coarse hair which fell down his breast he loosened a number of hairs, knotted them together into an



Silently the Murderous Weapon Descended.

almost invisible line then drew a fish hook from his pocket. This he fastened to the line; then arising passed to the table and fastened his pipe from the tobacco jar which sat upon it. Seeing that neither of the quarreling men were paying any attention to him he deftly fastened the hook through the plan, then lighting his pipe went back to his seat by the fire. Here while smoking imperturbably he quietly pulled the hair line and dragged the plan from the table and to him across the floor, slipping it into his pocket just as the quarrel came to an end. Morgan abruptly arose.

"Very well. We will let the matter rest until morning. You take the will and I'll keep the plan." Astonishment lighted his face as he glanced at the vacant place upon the table where until a few moments before the plan had reposed.

"It's gone!"

"Where?" demanded John. Morgan cast his eyes about, letting them rest upon Rainface who seemed to be dozing in his chair.

"You can search me. Neither does the Injun know, for I saw it lying there after he filled his pipe and he has not been near the table since."

"That is another thing we have got to let go until tomorrow. I am going to sleep in the harness room. There's a stove there." Midway in his crossing the floor the fish hook attracted his eye and bending picked it up. No sooner did he see the hair attached to it than he understood all. With a smile and a knowing glance at the Indian he passed from the room. As the door closed behind him the head of Rainface arose from his breast and his black eyes centered themselves upon the face of John Davis.

"Him bad white man," he said with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the departing one. John smiled.

"Maybe we have only seen his bad side, Rainface. I guess he will turn out all right when he has had a chance to think things over." Throwing his cigar aside he said "good night" and passed into the lean-to room, and seating himself upon the bed drew the will from his pocket and began to read it carefully, all unconscious of the fact that the malignant face of Hawk Morgan was peering at him from the darkness without.

An hour passed, and Morgan, cautiously opening the door of the harness room, lighted the lamp and stood in the center of the floor as he took quick mental inventory of what the room contained. Saddles and parts of harness hung upon pegs and half a dozen lariats lay about. Selecting one of these he went over its length carefully, then tying a handkerchief across his face he divested himself of his coat and picked up one which had belonged to John Carr. Creeping back to the cabin he peered in a window. Rainface sat nodding before the fire. Securing a ladder the prowler climbed to the roof. Cautiously he peered down

the broad chimney, then loosening a piece of mortar dropped it into the smoldering fire below. Awakened by the noise and flying ashes, Rainface bent forward to see whence the disturbance had come. As his head and shoulders appeared within the range of vision of the downpeering one on the roof, Morgan swiftly dropped the loop of his ravel about the other's form and drew it taut. Rainface, jerked upward so that his toes barely touched the floor, was fairly caught, but comprehending the meaning of it all he squirmed until he managed to draw forth the plan that he had hidden in his bosom. With a last effort he dropped it upon the coals and the paper, old and dry, burst into a blaze. With a twist of the rope about the chimney, Morgan leaving his victim securely trussed up, came clambering down and entering the cabin swiftly searched the Indian's clothes. Finding nothing and filled with rage he stepped back just as Rainface with a conclusive kick upset the table, spilling its contents clattering upon the floor. Quick as the dart of a weasel the prowler left the room.

Attracted by the noise of the falling objects Ethel and John rushed into the room. The suspended body of Rainface needed no explanation, and whipping a knife from his pocket John slashed the imprisoned one free. Rainface, sinking to a chair quickly told them all.

"Me not know who he was. Him have a handkerchief across his face, but wear old coat of master. Anyway me burn the map." Silently he pointed at the few flaky ashes upon the coals.

"Some prowling thief that was passing this way," said John lightly. "He won't come again. All we can do is go back to sleep, little girl." For the first time realizing that she was clothed only as she slept, the girl turned and fled from the room.

The door of the harness room again opened and once more Hawk Morgan entered. His face was dark with anger and disappointment that all his efforts proved unavailing in that no plan had been found, and clenching his fist he shook it in the direction of the cabin.

"I'll get you yet, Davis, and then the fortune and the girl will be mine." His glance fell upon a heavy bowie knife that hung in its sheath on the wall, and taking it down he tested its edge. Then with a flash of his teeth he picked up a hay rake from the floor and severed it just behind the wooden prongs. Then with a leather strap he bound the handle of the knife fast to it and crept out into the night, his deadly lance firmly gripped. Catlike he crept toward the cabin.

Within the lean-to John, who had been reading by the light of a lamp upon the shelf, had fallen asleep with the glow still falling over him. His bunk was against the lowest side of the lean-to, and in order that he might be ready for instant action should the mysterious prowler return had removed only his coat, vest and boots. A blanket was thrown partly over him and his revolver lay upon the table at his side.

Carrying a wooden horse to the side of the lean-to and carefully placing it in position, Morgan again mounted to the roof. With a hatchet he pried up the weather strip and looked through the crack between the shrunken boards and gazing down upon the exposed breast of the sleeping man. Cautiously he pointed the lance down through the opening.

Slowly, silently the murderous weapon descended, inch by inch drawing nearer to the heart of the sleeping one. A moment more and it would have been buried in the recumbent form, but at that moment the guardian angel, which so often watches over us in our helpless moments, intervened to save a life. Through the crack above a great snowflake sitting down fell upon the cheek of the sleeper, and at its cold impact, John opened his eyes. And though the thrust of Morgan was as quick as the strike of a serpent, the movements of John were even quicker. One upward sweep of his hand and he had grasped the lance just above the murderous knife.

Now ensued a silent struggle between the would-be assassin upon the roof and the one who was fighting for his life below. Taken at a terrible disadvantage, prostrate upon his back and with nothing but his naked hands with which to ward off death, John Davis struggled for his life. Three times the terrible weapon half wrenched from his grasp, poured itself into the bunk, but each time a desperate twist of his arms and body diverted it so that the keen point pierced nothing but the blanket. It did not seem that he could much longer avoid a fatal thrust. At any moment the blade might pierce through his fingers, half smothering them, and should that happen the instant the cold steel would pierce his vitals. And realizing his advantage and the helplessness of the one below, Hawk Morgan put all his strength into a final desperate downward thrust.

(END OF FIRST EPISODE)



The Bold Eyes of Morgan Devoured Her.