

Perils of Thunder Mountain

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NOVELIZED FROM VITAGRAPH PHOTO PLAY

SYNOPSIS

John Davis and Hawk Morgan, executives of the estate of John Carr, miner, discover over the disposition of the profits of the mine. Morgan seeks the gold and the girl, Ethel, Carr's adopted daughter, for himself, and unsuspected by Davis, whom Ethel really loved, makes numerous sensational attempts upon the life of Davis. Suspicion is directed to a mysterious hermit, trapped in a small hut. Ethel and Davis are hurled into a raging river by Morgan and his gang.

EPISODE 14.

THE HUT OF DISASTER

John and Ethel, having been confined in the little shack, the structure was then conveyed into the swollen mountain stream by the eight ruffians employed by Morgan and the Spider, and there turned loose. Immediately it was seized by the angry tide and borne away. Locked inside, the two victims found the water splashing through the walls and floor, while minute by minute the hut sank deeper. They soon found themselves upon the verge of being drowned like rats in a trap. Though John had managed to burst the window open, the aperture was too small to admit their bodies. Their only hope of escape, therefore, lay through the door which had been secured from the outside so firmly that he was unable to force the latch. Using the butt of his gun as a hammer, he wielded it so vigorously that he at last beat in a part of the upper half of it. Only to find it wedged beyond the possibility of opening. With the water already risen to their waists, he turned his eyes to the roof.

The covering of the affair was of light stuff, loosely nailed and carelessly weather striped. Could he have reached it he easily might have forced his way through, but with nothing in the room upon which he might stand such action was out of the question. But one hope remained. Quickly explaining to the girl what was necessary, he gave her the gun and hoisted her upon his shoulder. Desperately she set to work.

She thrust the steel barrel of the weapon through a chance opening which she encountered, and steadied by the man below and using all her strength she managed to pry one of the boards a short distance from its fellow. With this advantage gained her work became faster. Knowing that their lives were at stake she worked furiously and to such good result that she soon loosened a board wide enough to admit the passage of her body. This done she crawled through and seated herself upon the ridge pole, and the man, leaping up and grasping the side of the opening, quickly hauled himself to her side. For the moment they were safe, though the problem of their ultimate salvation remained still to be solved.

Looking across the angry water, John pointed ahead to where a big tree extended its limb far over the tide. He turned to the girl.

"There's an eddy right under that tree. If we can get this craft into that, we may be able to make the limb." Seizing the board which had been pried from the roof, he began paddling and steering the unwieldy bulk in the direction desired. Nearer and nearer the limb it swung, until at the moment ripened John placed himself astride the ridge pole and lifted the girl in the air. At that instant the house caught in the eddy and began to swing, and as it did so the man lifted his burden to the supporting branch. Ethel, grasping the saving object firmly, ensconced herself in safety as the man arose for the leap that would land him at her side. As he sprang, however, the treacherous footing beneath him gave a sverre and missing his mark, he shot downward, his head striking the side of the hut, and half-stunning him as he plunged into the torrent.

Seeing this from the bough upon which she sat, Ethel sat gazing with helpless horror as the body of her lover was swept away.

By the dim light of morning Morgan and the Spider, watching the shack on its wild course down the stream, saw two figures emerge from its interior and seat themselves upon the roof. The Hawk faced his companion with great disgust.

"They've got out of the box. Spider, you and the mine boss and Blackie come with me. The rest of you fellows go back to your blankets and say nothing. You don't need to remember about this when you get up. It was only a dream."

Followed by the two men he had chosen Morgan started rapidly off toward a bend at which he could intercept the floating hut. Ethel from her perch saw their approach, and sliding to the ground hastened to meet them. Together they all set out at full speed for the bend, reaching it a few minutes later.

The house, lodged against a rock in the foaming pass, was at a standstill, and John, who had been dashed against it had managed to grasp the eaves and pull himself once more to the roof where he now lay, gasping.

"We'll soon have him off, all right,"

said Morgan, consolingly to the still badly frightened girl. Sending his men back among the trees, they presently reappeared bearing a good sized log between them. Next unwrapping their lariats from their waists, they fastened two of them together in order to secure greater length of rope, after which the noose of one was slipped about the log. At a further order from Morgan the section of tree trunk was shoved out into the stream. Ethel was shoved out into the stream. Ethel was shoved out into the stream. Ethel was shoved out into the stream.

Having regained his breath and hearing the voice of Ethel, John sat up. A glance showed him the manner of escape which had been provided, and sliding down the roof he seated himself upon the log. Morgan, stepping to the river's brink, picked up the rope, at the same time calling to his fellows:

"Lead a hand here, men." His three followers immediately seized the line just above him.

"Now, ye heavens!" called their leader. Removed from its resting place by the strain upon the rope, the log swung into the center of the race, its lower end pointed straight for the falls, a short distance below. Before the strength of the four upon the shore it swung slowly inward until it was within a dozen feet of shoal water, and then it was that the Hawk ventured another trick in the desperate game he was playing. Seeing that the eyes of his companions, as well as those of the girl, were fastened upon the man who straddled the log, he drew a knife from his wrist and, with one swift move cut the rope upon which they were hauling. Released from its restraint, the log went plunging on its way to the falls below, bearing with it the man who once more had been the victim of his rival's treachery.

The scream of the girl was close followed by the cry of Morgan.

"The rotten thing broke," secretly pocketing his knife, he hurled the tell-tale rope into the stream, as if in great anger. Down the pass, rolling, tumbling and leaping, the log went racing with the man clinging desperately to it until a violent toss of the trunk of the tree broke his hand-hold and he found himself unsupported in the midst of the leaping waves. With the cataract close below him, he abandoned hope.

And that he would have been lost there can be no question had not a seeming miracle happened. From the brush which bounded the shore a lariat came uncoveling like a serpent through the air, the noose settling firmly about his shoulders. Totally unaware what had happened, but feeling his downward course suddenly checked, and seeing the rope, the half-drowned one seized it and pulled himself ashore.

Believing that the unfortunate in the river was doomed beyond the power of man to save him, those upon the bank went racing with the stream. What was their amazement, a moment later, to see him whom they had given up for lost crawling out upon the bank. Silently they all traced the lariat to its end, only to find it fastened securely to a tree, and with no one in sight.

"Well, I'll be blessed! Just how did this come about, Davis?" gasped the astonished Hawk. Quite frankly, the one addressed admitted that he did not know.

"I can't explain it, folks. I felt the noose settle about me, and grabbed the rope. I am as much puzzled as you can be. Of course, some one threw it, but who?"

They shook their heads stupidly. Rainface, watching them from a nearby covert with a look of satisfaction in his eyes, alone could have furnished the explanation.

"But how did we come to be locked in that house and thrown into the stream when you were on watch, Morgan?" demanded John as he fixed his eyes steadily upon the other. The Hawk raised a protesting hand.

"I was awakened from my sleep by hearing some one prowling about. Seeing danger, I endeavored to catch him, and he led me a mile away through the darkness before he gave me the slip. When I returned the house was gone, and I immediately summoned Spider and these men. That hermit is still up to his old tricks." Back they went to camp, John and Ethel bringing up in the rear, one wet arm about her waist.

Well in advance of the rest, and beyond their earshot, Morgan addressed Blackie.

"It will be worth five thousand to you to see to it that he permanently disappears. The Spider and I have tried time and again, but he always bobs up serenely. Maybe you will play in better luck." The one addressed nodded.

"Gimme a little on account, and I'll take a whirl at him." Pocketing the roll of bills which the other slipped to him, Blackie touched his cap and started for the sleeping place of the crew. They found the camp in great excitement.

The disappearance of the house with its two inmates was a matter of the greatest mystery, and the reappearance of the missing ones was the occasion for many congratulations. Escaping the attentions of the party as soon as possible, Ethel and John retired to tents to secure the dry clothing of which they were so much in need.

Warm and dry again, the girl emerged into the open, and catching sight of John nearby, secretly motioned that he follow her. He did so, presently catching up with her in a small clump of trees in the midst of which bubbled a large spring. Compelling him to sit at her feet, she parted the hair upon the crown of his head until the long cut made by his fall against the edge of the house lay revealed. Despite his protests that it was but a scratch, she began lavishing it with cool water from the spring, finishing by bandaging it with lint from a small bottle which she had brought. He caught her hand and lifted it.

"If there is so much magic in your hands, what must there be in your lips?" he asked with a little laugh.

"Try them—and find out," she laughed, flushing.

He got up on his feet, and bowing his face, kissed her. As he did so a knife sang through the space which his head the instant before had occupied, plunging into the spring with a loud splash. With a little scream, the girl sprang back, while John, raising his head, stood with eyes fixed upon the fringe of brush which bounded the little clearing in which they stood. Then as his hand sought his revolver, the man Blackie stepped slowly forth.

"What do you mean?" demanded John as his weapon began to creep into sight. The other paused.

"Mean? I just seen a trout jump in that brook and stepped in here to see if I could get a look at him. Didn't suspect you and the miss was here, sir." So innocent and apologetic was his manner that Davis thrust the weapon back into its place.

"We are all ready to start as soon as you folks are," continued Blackie, and with a nod signifying their readiness to depart, they followed him back to camp. Finding everything packed in and in readiness, John and the girl rode off up the trail, leaving the more slowly moving pack train to follow.

Meanwhile Blackie, enraged by his failure in throwing the knife, accompanied by the Spider and Fream, by taking a short cut and urging their horses, had reached a spot some distance ahead where a foot bridge of logs crossed a narrow but deep gully. Throwing themselves from their saddles they began to work furiously.

First, removing a number of the poles which composed the floor of the bridge, they inserted in their place cracked and rotten saplings which would scarcely bear the weight of a man, let alone a horse. Having thus so weakened a section of the bridge that no horseman could cross, they covered the evidence of their deed with dirt and hastily withdrew from sight.

Meanwhile John and Ethel, riding side by side, reached the deep gully which was spanned by the weakened

footway. They halted before it, eyeing it closely, for though they had often crossed it before, they never did so without the precaution of a preliminary scanning of the frail-looking structure. To their eyes it lay as safe as it had been when they passed that way the week before on their journey to the city, and with a laugh the man urged his animal forward.

"It looks all right, but you had better let me go ahead, girl," he called over his shoulder and, halted by his words, Ethel drew rein and followed him with loving and anxious eyes as he advanced. For a few steps all went well; then the inevitable happened. His horse, stepping upon the rotten saplings placed there by the murderous-minded Blackie and his companions, gave way with a crash, and as a rocket falls so did the horse shoot through the opening. John, throwing out an arm, managed to secure a hold upon a side log and checked himself, but the horse went hurtling and rolling far down into the depths, to add up a mangled mass upon the rocks below.

One short, sharp cry burst from the lips of the girl, then she became still as death. Seeing that the man she loved was hanging by his finger tips to the log and making desperate efforts to pull himself up, she slipped from the saddle and with wildly beating heart and dizzy brain, crept upon the structure to the opening through which the ill-fated steed had plunged. Reaching the man's side, she seized him by the collar and began lifting with all her strength. Stender though she was, her strength was not inconsiderable, and with her aid he quickly managed to clamber over the edge. Scarcely had he regained his feet than Morgan came riding up at the head of the train. He stared at the hole.

"If you haven't got more luck, Davis! Well, I'm certainly glad you didn't follow that horse down there. Now who'd have thought that bridge would go to the bad that way?" Calling a number of men, the opening was quickly and safely repaired and the outfit continued on its way.

They arrived at the home house, to see Bridget flying down the trail to meet them. Tears streamed from the honest Irish woman's face as she seized the girl in her mighty arms and pressed her to her bosom, patting her back, laughing, crooning over her as a mother does over a child. She swung John's hand with nearly a man's strength, and would have embraced him also in her joy had he not fended her off with a laugh and the hint that they were all nearly starved. Thus reminded of her duties, she gathered up her skirts and went flying back to the kitchen nearly as fast as she had come from it, her disappearance being immediately followed by a tremendous clatter of knives and forks. The meal which she soon afterwards set before them more than repaid them for all the perils and hardships through which they had gone.

As the evening advanced Morgan spoke:

"Tomorrow we'll make an early start for the mine with the boys. The en-

gineers will go up to the sawmill, where the machinery is stored, and overhaul it. Davis, you bring Ethel up to the mine after breakfast. We will leave about sunup, while she is having her beauty sleep." He left the room and passed into the darkness, where the Spider was awaiting him.

"Any orders for tonight?" inquired the latter. The Hawk negatived.

"Nothing doing. There are too many in the cabin. But we'll have another try tomorrow." As Bellas disappeared, Morgan re-entered the house.

It was decided that the engineers should take Ethel's old room and that the girl should use the spare bed in the chamber of Bridget. The other men were to occupy the last-to-and-hardest room, with the exception of Morgan and John, who decided to bed themselves down in front of the fireplace. This settled, they bade each other good-night and retired.

Lying awake before the fireplace, Morgan glared evilly at his sleeping companion, one hand upon his knife. "The credulous fool!" he mused. "How easy it would be." He unsheathed the blade and ran his thumb along its keen edge, then deciding that it would be wiser to wait another day, he thrust the weapon back into place, and rolling upon his side, composed himself to sleep.

They were upon their feet with the first break of day, and having finished breakfast, Morgan, the Spider, the mine boss, Blackie, the assayer and the rest of the men mounted their horses. John, standing in the doorway, waved them an adieu.

"Miss Ethel and I will join you presently," he called. Morgan, shouting back that there was no necessity for their hurrying, turned aside to the Spider.

"I believe if we go straight up the mountain this way, we will save a mile or two on our way to the mine," said he, and, as the other man nodded his acquiescence, they turned aside from the trail and followed by the rest went clambering on. A mile farther up they reached a shack which was built on the mountainside over a forty-five degree slope, which ended in a cliff, the latter falling into a deep valley. The Hawk drew rein.

"Never saw that shack before," he said. The Spider laughed.

"Neither did I, for the simple reason that I never came this way before." Together they passed the hut, but later encountering a small mountain stream that crossed their path, they at once urged their mounts into it up to their bellies. The horses stopped and began to drink.

As Morgan's animal lowered its head the man, feeling a little thirsty also, removed his hat and bent forward to scoop up a brimful. This brought his face nearly to a level with the clear mountain stream, and as he looked down through the transparent water he caught sight of something glittering and glowing on the pebbles below. With a yell, he arose in his stirrups, one finger pointing downward.

"Wade in there, one of you men, and see what you find," he commanded, and a moment later a miner stood waist-deep in the stream. Reaching down at the point indicated by his superior, the man's fingers came in contact with the object sought, and throwing it over his shoulder he waded to the bank. At their feet he tossed a torn gunny sack partially filled with ingots of gold—one of the sacks borne from the room of the girl by the hermit as she slept.

For a moment the men gaped about the bars of virgin metal, staring at it as though transfixed. Followed a wild scramble into the creek in search of more. As they emerged, dripping, Morgan turned upon them with a laugh.

"Boys, this isn't a circumstance to what the mine will give us if we can only get rid of—" Suddenly he stopped, aware that the eyes of the assayer, the only honest man in the outfit, were fixed upon him in wonderment.

"If we can only get rid of the bad luck which has pursued us," he finished lamely. "Meanwhile, we had better take this find back to that shack we just passed and store it there."

As Ethel and John were making their preparations to leave for the mine, the girl took John by the hand and looked earnestly into his face.

"All my fears and suspicions of Morgan have returned with redoubled force. You are unwilling to think evil of him, but for my sake, watch him. Don't trust him hereafter. I beg of you. I feel it here—" Her hand stole over her heart. Somewhat worried, the man drew her to him.

"Your persistence weakens my confidence somewhat. If he was a traitor, it would explain—but I cannot believe it. Yet, for your sake, I will be on my guard and watch him. Good-by!"

"You are not going to the mine without me!" she asked quickly. He shook his head.

"No, only to show the engineers to the sawmill. I'll come back for you before I go to the mine."

Kissing her good-by, he took up his rifle and went in search of the engineers, while she watched him until

he disappeared, a vague uneasiness in her breast.

Well on his way, John was startled at seeing an object fall close before him, where it stood quivering in the ground. A glance told him that it was an arrow, and looking upward, he saw a figure standing upon a ledge, who with a threatening gesture, sprang back and disappeared. Angered at what he considered a daringly attempt upon his life, Davis cocked his rifle and started forward on a run. Five minutes later Rainface, stepping from behind a tree with hand upraised, advanced upon the amazed John, and without speaking, led him to a point which overlooked Morgan's troop just leaving the shack. The Indian's voice fairly blazed, so great was his passion.

"He had gold. He had gold! He try kill you. He had man. He know. For a moment John hesitated, then noting the fearful earnestness of the other, he nodded.

"I'll go down and see about it. You keep hidden until I see you." Off he went, half sliding down the trail. Before Morgan he halted.

"What are you doing here?" was his demand. Faling with anger, the Hawk gazed at him.

"Since when was I accountable to you?" he sneered.

"What did you put in that shack?" "Nothing."

"That's a lie. You put gold there. Are you a thief? A traitor?" The face of the Hawk grew livid with rage. John threw up his hand, and at the signal the old Indian sprang among them, one long finger pointed at the traitor.

"Keep big hat, Spider, too. Me see you fix beat, cut rope—do everything!" he said fiercely. Whipping out his gun, the villain roared to his crew.

"Get 'em, boys. All the gold in the shack for you!"

Seizing the man nearest to him, Davis hurled him into the midst of the already onrushing pack. Two leaps took him within the shack. Rainface at his side. Instantly they slammed the door shut and barred it, by good fortune the windows of the place being already heavily shuttered. Barely in time they threw themselves upon the floor, for the next instant a rain of bullets came splintering through the door, while from knots holes and cracks they returned the compliment as best they could. And so hot was the fire that the gang outside broke and took shelter behind the trees.

From their places of concealment, Fream, taking Morgan by the sleeve, pointed at the shack.

"If we could cut those two lower foundation posts on which the shack rests, the whole shebang would slide to the edge of the cliff and go smashing down into the valley." The dark face of Morgan lighted.

"Good. I'll have it done." He called to two of his men.

"You fellows take saws, and while we divert their attention by a sham attack in front, you two sneak around the other way and saw off those posts. Savvy?" With grins of appreciation of their opportunity to win reward, the scoundrels crept away, while the rest of the gang opened a heavy fire upon the little building.

Within the shack, John and Rainface were battling desperately for their lives. Lying upon the floor and entirely out of sight of the ruffians without, they kept so keen a watch that no sooner was an arm or leg exposed than a bullet soon found it, sending its owner down with a howl of pain. Davis turned to his partner with a grim smile.

"I guess we can hold them off, Rainface. They can't get in, and unless they can think of some new devilment—" He ceased speaking and sat up in alarm. Slowly but unmistakably the little building was beginning to slide down the steep slope toward where the cliff dropped in a sheer plunge.

"Great God! We're going over!" he cried.

Helpless, thrown this way and that by the violent tiltings of the affair, they clung onto whatever came handiest, gazing into each other's face with the eyes of men already dead.

In the very act of plunging into the abyss, the stump of one of the severed supports caught upon a projection, stopping the onward movement of the building but bending and buckling beneath the strain. A glance telling him that it needed but a trifling effort to remove this last obstacle and send the structure crashing to the bottom, the Spider swiftly uncoviled a rope. Almost quicker than can be told he had made one end fast to the bent and fast-weakening post, while a dozen hands eagerly seized the other end of the lariat.

"Now, all together!" roared Morgan. There was a mighty heave upon the rope, and before it the weak support gave way. Pointing itself for a moment on the brink and seeming to shudder in every joint and plank at the fate that was in store for it, the building toppled into its awful plunge.

(END OF FOURTEENTH EPISODE.)



A Knife Sang Through the Space Where His Head Had Been.