

Zudora

A Great Mystic Story by Harold McGrath

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SYNOPSIS.

Zudora is left an orphan at an early age. Her father is killed in a gold mine, and the fortune from the mine, which grows to be worth \$20,000,000, are left in the guardianship of Frank Keene, Zudora's mother's brother. Zudora, giving promise of great beauty, reaches the age of eighteen. The uncle, who has set himself up as a Hindu mystic and is known as Hassam Ali, decides that Zudora must die before she can have a chance to come into possession of her money, so that it may be left to him, the next of kin. Hassam Ali sees an obstacle to his scheme in the person of John Storm, a young lawyer, for whom Zudora has taken a fancy, and he commands the girl to put the man out of her mind. Zudora insists that if she cannot marry Storm she will marry no one.

"Well, well," says Hassam Ali, "if you take such a stand I'll compromise. Solve my next twenty cases and you can marry him; fail in a single case and you must renounce him."

Zudora, using the knowledge gained from years of association with her uncle, unravels a baffling mystery and wins her first case—a case in which John Storm is saved from being convicted of a murder instigated by Hassam Ali himself.

Zudora and Hassam Ali visit Nabok Shan's house, where she overcomes every one whenever Nabok attempts to marry a princess. Storm, seeking Zudora, is made a prisoner. Zudora tells Nabok Shan, restores the princess to her original lover and saves Storm from death.

CHAPTER III.

The Mystery of the Cheesemaker.

In a kind of cellar, under a window, a man sat, bent over a peculiarly constructed machine of small wheels that spun with lightning rapidity. Every now and then he paused and scrutinized the minute object he held in his fingers. At length he seemed satisfied, rose, stopped the machine and shuffled over to a cupboard. Then he sat down on a cot and began to figure in a small notebook. The result of his mathematics evidently pleased him.

In a corner behind curtains stood a furnace, a crucible, with powerful bellows and chimney. It looked adaptable to tremendous heat pressure. The machine previously referred to was an unfamiliar one to any but the eyes of those who have watched similar machines in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in Holland. It was a diamond cutting and polishing machine. What the unusual crucible brought forth remained to be seen.

The diamond cutter rose again and once more approached the cupboard and gazed over his treasure, which consisted of half a dozen perfect gems perfectly cut and polished, but small. "I shall be rich some day."

Then came sudden transition from joy to gloom. He dared not go forth openly to sell these gems, for he feared that he would be looked upon as a thief. The fact that these diamonds were not registered would act against him. The least they would do would be to hale him before the customs officials as a smuggler. And if he told the truth his wonderful discovery would become public property, and he would be ruined.

"I am unlucky," he groaned. "I see how it is. I must divide with some one in order to get anything. I will sound Hassam Ali."

He had disposed of several gems among pawnbrokers who were known not to ask questions, but in these transactions he had received but a fourth of what the gems were worth. These things contributed to his sudden rise and fall of spirits. He was also something of a madman.

Presently he sniffed. There was a faint odor of curds in the air. Beyond the wall was a cheesemaker's shop, and there one could buy anything from a Camembert to what is known as a Dutch cheese. The diamond cutter discovered that he was hungry. So he left his den, bought some cheese and rye bread and returned, soon to begin his labors again. During certain intervals of silence he heard without apparent notice slight scratching sounds. The furnace began to glow, throwing weird lights upon his lined and ecstatic countenance.

When night came he went again to his treasure and gave a cry of anguish. A gem was gone! He searched thoroughly but could not find it. It could not be possible that he had made a mistake in the original counting. He would go and have his friend Hassam Ali look into his crystal. There were wonderful revelations made there, and Hassam Ali reassured him that the gem would be found.

The next day, after Zudora had gone forth to meet her lover, Hassam Ali was assured—Hassam Ali retired to the mystic room. He was curious to see how long his sister's face would keep turning in the heart of the crystal. He was intensely superstitious without realizing the fact. Yet again he saw the face, the same appeal in it. His heart swelled with fury and hate. He was beginning to hate his niece, for he invariably hate those who have wronged or intend to wrong. Whenever he saw her slender white throat a horrible, almost irresistible, desire laid hold of him to take that white throat within his fingers and crush the life out of it. At the same time he became vaguely alarmed lest at some time or other he should surrender to this mad desire. No, no!



Hassam Ali Was an Adept at Disguising Himself.

A thousand times not! He must follow without deviation the plans he had mapped out. Sooner or later he would gain his ends without incriminating himself. She suspected nothing. One side of her was all keenness and insight, but the other side of her was as guileless as a child, and to this she always played. He must wait, tedious as waiting might be. Gold, gold, yellow gold, the most beautiful thing in the world; millions of shining disks, all his. He suddenly shook himself. He must smother these thoughts, this rampant desire, or he might overstep. Misers are full of strange cunning.

Zudora had given her word to say nothing about her great inheritance, and her loyalty to her word was as strong as hoops of steel.

Hassam Ali was an adept at disguising himself, making himself unrecognizable. A half dozen touches of the brush, a muffler about his chin, and even Zudora would fail to recognize him at first glance. He sallied forth. He was eager to learn what Storm was doing. For the present Storm was the main obstacle in his way. If he became Zudora's husband, goodby to the Trainer millions, whether Zudora lived or not. If Zudora married Storm clandestinely he was determined upon that knowledge to kill them both. Once a week he made inquiries at the bureau of licenses.

Zudora met Storm in the park, and they idled away an hour or two building castles in Spain. The will of Jason Olds having been probated, Storm was the recipient of a hundred thousand, which he immediately divided between several hospitals. He wanted it known that, aside from his business relations, he wanted nothing of Olds, living or dead. His gift reacted favorably.

Storm became suddenly serious. "My dear," he said, "I want to ask you some really vital questions."

"Go ahead."

"Do you love your uncle?"

She did not answer at once because the question was totally unexpected. She began to think.

"Why, John, that's an odd question."

"I know it, but I just simply had to ask it."

"I respect him," she said, "for he is a man of extraordinary attainments."



Zudora Met Storm in the Park.

for all that you sometimes smile at his occupations."

"It is precisely because he plays at this mummy and is at the same time an extraordinary man that I ask you if you love him."

"Love is a strange thing," she replied evasively. She felt strangely stirred over the trend of conversation.

"You don't answer me directly." He was an attorney and had something of the bulldog's grip. There were many unhappy witnesses who would testify to that.

"Well, no; I can't say honestly that I love him," frowning.

"Nor can you say honestly that he loves you. My dear girl, I might as well admit to you that some one is interested in putting me out of the way. I've been shot at in the dark on three different occasions. I have received anonymous letters purporting to come from some disgruntled politician. I think the best thing you can do is to marry me."

"Not until every letter of my agreement is complete."

"I suppose you've made up your mind?"

"Yes. Just as firmly as I have made up my mind that you're my man and that I wouldn't exchange you for the greatest kingdom on earth."

He laughed and pressed her hand. He had been on the point of telling her his innermost suspicions. He saw now that she was going to have trouble enough without his adding to it. Brave little girl! Because she loved him she had assumed almost three times the tasks of Hercules. He became more and more determined to follow her and stand guard over her in every case she had—that is, if they left him alone.

From the bottom of his soul he distrusted Keene, Hassam Ali, so called. It did not require an unusually sharp intuition to feel the sense of hatred directed against him whenever he came into the presence of the mystic. But he possessed no defined theory as to what had caused this activity of passion. It was born of no tender sentiment for the niece. Nor could it be due to the fact that he, Storm, looked with contempt upon Keene's work. He knew Keene to be absolutely indifferent to what the public thought of his affairs. In this Storm was compelled to admit of a secret admiration for the man. Think deeply and constantly as he might, however, he could not bring to the surface any legitimate cause for Keene's bitter antagonism.

Storm's mistake was that he did not revert to Zudora what his real suspicions were—that it was Hassam Ali who wanted him out of the way. They both in that event would have escaped a good deal of trouble, being mutually prepared for it.

When they at last separated Storm went downtown, quite aware of the fact that he was being shadowed. But he did not recognize his shadower.

Storm usually worked late at night in his study, and he generally felt the need of a bite before turning in. This midnight lunch consisted of cheese and crackers and a pint of ale. He was seldom troubled with insomnia. Every other day he would drop into Altmann's cheese shop, chat awhile with the cheesemaker, his wife and daughter,



He Would Drop Into Altmann's Cheese Shop.

ter, and then leave with his regular purchase.

Now it happened that Hassam Ali's midnight appetite was similar to that of Storm's, except that Hassam Ali never touched alcoholic beverages of any sort. Moreover, he was friend to both cheesemaker and diamond cutter. There was more to the latter than most people suspected. When the mystic saw Storm enter the cheesemaker's his first inspiration was to learn what sort of cheese he generally purchased and eventually substitute a poisoned one. It was immaterial to him whether Altmann paid for the deed or not.

As Storm entered one door the diamond cutter came out of the other. Hassam Ali made a sign, which the latter answered. Together they reentered the building. Hassam Ali had no desire to run into Storm.

"I did not recognize you, master," said the diamond cutter.

"And never recognize me unless you see me make the sign. Well, have you made up your mind?"

"I am going to trust you."

"Why not? I may be able to help you a great deal," said Hassam Ali, secretly pleased that he had won his point. "I am like a physician or a priest. Whatever you may tell me will be buried in my breast," his strong, magnetic eyes boring into the other's. The diamond cutter was always in such a mental state as to lend himself readily to hypnotism, and without being aware of it he fell under the spell immediately Hassam Ali spoke to him. "Lead on."

The diamond cutter led the way to his cell-like shop and threw back the curtains, revealing the furnace and crucible. Deftly he placed a piece of carbon in the receptacle and turned a switch. There came a blinding flash,

and the heat of it drove Hassam Ali backward toward the wall.

"We must wait a few moments. Sometimes the heat is too small, sometimes too hot. The secret is the medium heat."

The speaker threw off the power, stood immovable for the space of four minutes, then delicately picked out a black lump. This he skillfully broke with a small hammer. Presently he held out his palm. A crystal a little larger than a pinhead lay upon it.

"What is it?" asked Hassam Ali.

"A diamond of the purest water," was the exultant answer. "The main obstacle in producing diamonds artificially has been the great expense for each experiment. It was not practical diamond making. There was no compensation in the result. It summed up, just a man of science striving to wrest from nature one of her greatest secrets. It costs me about one-fourth of what each diamond is worth. But I must have a bigger furnace, more power. I have figured out the relative degrees of heat."

"Will you let me take this crystal to a jeweler?" asked Hassam Ali, tremendously interested.

"Certainly. I have sold many to pawnbrokers, but I have been afraid to come out into the open."

"Trust me," said Hassam Ali.

So he took the diamond away. He was still a bit skeptical. It might be that this diamond cutter was not such a fool as he looked. In some scientific manner the crystal might have been previously confined in the carbon. If the man offered to sell his invention Hassam Ali would feel assured that there was bamboozlement somewhere



"A diamond of the purest water."

in the background. He was himself too old a bird to be caught at such a game. But if this was honestly done!

He was informed at the jeweler's that the crystal was an uncut diamond, perfectly white, and worth about \$40. So far so good. Hassam Ali returned to the inventor.

"It's a white diamond, worth about \$40. Now, before we go any further, let me see a piece of carbon."

The inventor exhibited his stock and invited Hassam Ali to make his selection. To Hassam Ali's mind, had each piece contained a diamond the inventor already possessed a small fortune. He was beginning to feel reassured. Soon another diamond came to life as it were. Hassam Ali was convinced. There was no charlatanism in him. The man had discovered one of the greatest secrets in the world.

"Oh, I have failures. Sometimes the carbon is not right. Again, the power is not strong enough. But I will show you some of the gems I have already made."

He went to the cupboard and produced his little board. He poured them into Hassam Ali's hands. The gems were all exquisitely cut and polished. The largest was about the size of an ordinary parlor match head.

"How many here?" inquired the visitor, now genuinely astonished.

"Ten."

Hassam Ali counted them. He shook his head.

"Only eight."

"Impossible!"

"Count them yourself."

The inventor did so. He ran to the cupboard and searched every nook.

"I have been robbed!"

"Sh; not so loud!" warned Hassam Ali. "You say you cut ten stones in



The Crystal Was an Uncut Diamond.

there. Here are but eight. In other words, some one has been rifling the cupboard. My advice is to catch the thief without drawing the police in. Put seals on the door and the lock. I notice that the wall is very thin."

"Bah! Altmann is an old fool. He thinks I am a locksmith," contemptuously.

"You never can tell. I will come to

morrow, and together we'll examine the seals."

"But what do you think?"

"About what?"

"The stones."

"Oh, I am quite certain that in the event of your being able to make the stones in carat sizes you will not only be famous, but rich. Still, you know what a sensitive thing a diamond is. It would be wise to keep your secret until you have made your fortune."

"I'm no fool. If it got about that I made diamonds at a profit, however



The Trap Was Neatly Arranged and Laid.

small, the diamond market would go to smash."

Seals were applied to the cupboard, and Hassam Ali went away.

The moment he was gone the diamond cutter berated himself furiously. What had possessed him to take Hassam Ali so utterly into his confidence? And there was a thief about! How could any one have known that he had diamonds? And more puzzling than all else, why hadn't the thief taken them all? He did not sleep well that night.

When he and Hassam Ali broke the seals in the morning there were but six stones left.

"Altmann!" cried the diamond cutter. "He has some hole in the wall. I'll kill him!"

"Be still!" said Hassam Ali sternly, seizing the man and shaking him violently. "If he is guilty and bears you, goodby to your gems. We'll put a dictograph in and find out what the cheesemaker and his family talk about. You needn't worry about the expense. I'll see to that. And we'll go to work at once. A dictograph down the wall



The Cry Had Been a Practical Joke.

and a bear trap in front of the cupboard, and we'll soon know who the culprit is."

The dictograph was promptly installed, and the trap was neatly arranged and laid. But the conversation recorded was useless, and nobody stepped into the bear trap. Two more diamonds were gone!

"Listen," said Hassam Ali. "I'll rush out yelling 'Fire! Fire!' That will clear the cheese shop and give me a chance to make an investigation."

"I leave everything to you," said the half demented inventor. He was panting and holding his hand over his heart. "It is making me ill. My heart is bad."

Things fell out as Hassam Ali predicted. Only he had not expected John Storm in the cheese shop. At the cry of fire Storm ran out with the others and accidentally dropped his purchase. Hassam Ali saw the package fall, and, instead of entering the shop, he ran to the package and picked it up, on the principle that anything belonging to John Storm might eventually prove useful. He thrust it into his pocket and started back to make his investigations, but it was now too late. The cheesemaker, seeing no signs of fire anywhere, had returned to his shop. So Hassam Ali made his way back to the diamond cutter's. When he opened the package and found some cheese he swore and flung it from him sav-

agely. Then he picked it up and broke it.—It was a good cheese, and it would be shameful to waste it.

"Look!" he cried suddenly. From the cheese he plucked a small diamond.

"I knew it!" exclaimed the unhappy diamond cutter. "It's Altmann, after all!"

Meantime Storm, having lost his cheese in the small riot and learning that the cry had been a practical joke or the clever scheme of a petty thief, returned to the shop, somewhat ruffled in spirit, to purchase another cheese. He had scarcely taken it into his hand when the diamond cutter, followed by two policemen, came rushing in and demanded the arrest of every one in the shop—that is to say, Storm, the cheesemaker and his wife. They did not take his daughter, who remained behind weeping.

Storm was permitted to telephone Zudora.

"What is the matter?" she demanded.

"It seems that I've been arrested as an accomplice of Altmann, the cheesemaker, on the charge of stealing diamonds from a diamond cutter living next door. The diamonds were found in a cheese I bought. As a matter of fact, I think it's a practical joke of some sort. You know where Altmann's is. Nothing serious can possibly come of it, but I'll have to do a lot of buying when I leave the police station. The laugh is on me somewhere."

"I'll have you out before midnight," she declared.

But she nearly lost her life in the furnace room. The diamond cutter ran amuck when he saw her enter his chamber of secrets, and he flew at her like an enraged tiger. She studied him and picked up a hammer, with which to defend herself. The hammer was nothing to the madman. He reached out to clutch her when he gave a weird cry, stumbled and fell headlong



He Reached Out to Clutch Her.

into the furnace mouth. His heart had given out.

And so Hassam Ali would never be able to add diamonds to his pyramids of shining gold.

But the death of the diamond cutter complicated matters, and, despite the protestations of innocence on the part of the victims, they were held.

When the truth did come out finally the whole city laughed quietly. Zudora discovered the thieves—a pair of bright eyed mice who had decided to go house building with diamonds as a cornerstone!

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

In the Presence of Death.

Some years ago a Swansea vessel was caught in a terrible gale. The captain had his wife on board, and when the wind was still rising he told her to go down below and sleep, for all was well. He remained on the bridge till the mate came up and said: "We've done all we can. Hadn't you better tell the chaps to get out the boats?"

"Yes, yes, my lad, if you think so," said the captain, who knew the only choice left was whether to go down with the ship or in a small boat, which couldn't live ten seconds in that sea. The engineers came up with the news that the fires were all out.

"Very well, my lads," said the captain quietly. "Save yourselves if you can."

"Won't you fetch the wife on deck, sir?" asked one of the men.

"No," was the calm reply. "Let her sleep, poor girl! I am going down to have a smoke." And, smoking by the bedside of his sleeping wife, he went down with the ship.

Didn't Recognize Her.

She was of a somewhat haughty nature and, being on a shopping expedition with a friend, happened to catch a glimpse of an acquaintance she did not wish to recognize.

"Let us go this way past the silk counter. I just saw some one I don't care to meet."

"Who is he?" asked her friend, who did not see any one near them.

"Oh, some horrid woman with a smirk on her face. Of course I have only a bowing acquaintance with her, and, although her face is familiar, I cannot remember her name."

They finished their shopping, and the two women found themselves at the same point where one of them had seen her disagreeable acquaintance.

"There she is again. Why, I do believe she's been here all the time!" she said, pointing to the person in question.

"That woman? Goodness sakes; that's yourself you see in the mirror there!"—Kansas City Star.