

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, fall 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 foils Nabok Shan, restores the princess to her original lover and saves Storm from death.

A maker of diamonds tells Hassam Ali his secret. Storm informs Zudora that his life is being attempted frequently. Storm suspects Hassam Ali. Storm is arrested for stealing the diamond maker's gems, but Zudora discovers the real thieves—a pair of mice.

The negro help employed on Storm's father's farm are fleeing because a great skeleton hand appears at night upon a hill near by. Storm is baffled in his investigation, but Zudora learns that her uncle has employed Jimmy Bolton, a half-witted man, thus to annoy Storm's parents. Zudora finds Bolton operating a big magic lantern and is attacked by Bolton. Storm opportunely appears and saves her from Bolton.

Hassam Ali asks Zudora to find a gem lost by two mysterious old men. Zudora gets a photograph of the gem and it burns in her hand. An old house is mined by Hassam Ali and the old men. Storm and Zudora are lured there and narrowly escape destruction when the house blows up.

CHAPTER VI.

The Case of the McWintor Family.

In a room in an ordinary dwelling a woman sat before a sewing machine. The low hum of it filled the room with a murmur like that of many bees.

The woman's husband, seated at a table near by, was reading and smoking, and he looked up absently each time the humming ceased temporarily. He scowled, shifted and reshifted his pipe.

"Are you crying again?" he growled laying down the pipe. "I'm getting tired of your constant snivel-snivel. He rose and walked over toward her threateningly. He shook a finger under her nose.

"That man has got to get out of this house or I'll know the reason why. He bothers me every time I look at him. I tell you he's got to seek another boarding house. I don't want his hangdog face around any longer."

"Hangdog?" she protested.

"That's what I said. There'll be a rumpus if he doesn't hike."

"You are wrong—you are wickedly wrong," said the wife. She wiped her eyes on her apron. "Just because he speaks kindly to me and pets the child you set like an insane man. I've snivled for you. I've done everything a woman could. What do you do? You sit and read all day."

"That's a lie!" the man roared. "I'm not an ordinary workman, and there's very little demand for my work."

"So I've noticed," drily.

"I don't want any back talk. All I say is that man Smith has got to get out. I won't have him on the premises after his week is up."

The tears began to run down the woman's cheeks again. "You were a different sort of man before you took to drink."

"Your whining'd send any man to drink. But you two are always whining, and when I show up you break apart and begin to talk of the weather. Maybe you think I'm a fool?"

"John McWintor!" she cried with passionate indignation.

"That's right. Work on the injured look. But the martyr stuff doesn't go with me, Sally. I've got eyes, and I've been using them. He goes at the end of his week, and that's all there is to it. He's got the child running around after him as if he and not I was the father."

"That's because he is always kind to her and never strikes her unjustly as you do."

"Hush! A man got a right to correct his own offspring. I'd like to know?"

"If she gets in your way you box her ears. If she does not come in stantly when you call her you use the whip. Can you blame the child for not loving you as you expect?"

"For herself she did not care; she had no illusions left, but where her child was concerned she was something of a flossess. She did not want the fairy tale beliefs knocked out of the little one's head before her time."

"Stop sniveling. The man's coming. It'd be just like you to play the beaten wife when he comes in. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to give you a smack once in a while. Then maybe you'd have something to snivel about."

The man who was the innocent cause of this conjugal arrangement came in, his laboring man's tunic basket under his arm. His expression was that of

a man who had done his work that day faithfully and welcomed the coming of evening.

He nodded pleasantly. He saw the red eyes of the woman, squared his shoulders for a moment and passed on.

"Humph! I notice that you don't snivel while he's looking at you."

"How can you talk to me like that?"

"I'll talk to you as I please."

"You are always in the house. You are watching every move I make as if I wasn't a good woman. When I married you I loved you. You were an analytical chemist who every one said would make a mark in the world, but drink has thrown you on the reefs. And sometimes I hate you!"

He caught her by the shoulder and swung her out of the chair and raised his arm.

"Here, here, McWintor!" cried a voice from the doorway. "None of that while I am in the house. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"This is my woman. I'll strike her if I want to."

"Oh, will you?"

The boarder sprang forward and caught the upraised arm, giving it no gentle wrench as he bore down upon it.

That was enough for McWintor. With a snarl like a wolf he closed in. Almost instantly his back met the floor with a resounding thump.

"Don't! Don't!" pleaded the wife.

"It will only make matters worse. You can't help me, Mr. Smith. Please go!"

"All right, Mrs. McWintor, but I haven't any use for a wife beater."

"You'll leave this house Saturday," said McWintor, picking himself up slowly. "Saturday night, and then you and your truck for the sidewalk. I've stood all I'm going to stand. Maybe you think I'm a fool, but I know what I know."

The beaten man slunk out of the house, cursing under his breath.

He realized that he would never get any satisfaction out of Smith in a



"I guess that'll fix you."

game of hideouts; the latter was too strong for him. He'd get him where he wanted him some day, and that day wasn't going to be far off either.

He did not come home until midnight. He grinned drunkenly in the mirror as he yanked off his tie and collar.

He wasn't a chemist for nothing; Smith would see. McWintor was a madman, and nobody suspected this fact.

The next morning he remained in bed with a splitting headache.

As Smith started out for his day's work he caught up the child and swung her aloft. She gurgled with happiness. Then he kissed her and set her down.

"I'm going to bring you that stick of candy tonight."

"Goody, goody! Can I eat it, mamma?"

"Yes, dear." To the man she said: "How long? How long?"

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Sally. We'll straighten out this muddle in time. It looks to me like McWintor isn't quite right in his upper story. If we could get him away from his whiskey there might be a chance. But he's an Indian when he's boozed up. They say at the laboratory that they'd be glad to give him steady work if they could trust him."

"Sometimes I've been wicked enough to wish that he was dead."

"None of that kind of talk, little woman."

"You've been so good to us!"

"Who wouldn't be? Remember, now, mamma's the word. Keep him in a good humor as much as you can, and when the time comes we'll light out and let the foot shift for himself."

McWintor crawled out of bed about 10 o'clock, ugly and taciturn. When his wife spoke to him he did not answer. She sighed and returned to her sewing machine.

But for the child she knew that she must have given up the struggle long ago. She did not want any shadow to fall upon that pretty childhood.

Her own had been unhappy enough, and she was determined that the little one should not be disillusioned before her time.

Sometimes the machine stopped, and the woman gazed into the blue arch of heaven. To wish any one dead, no matter how cruel he might be, was a sin.

"Chickety-chickety, chickety-chickety, sang the machine. From another part of the house came the happy laughter of the child.

McWintor left the house after drinking a cupful of strong coffee and strolling the road toward the woods, where he finally came upon a shack. It was rather peculiarly constructed.

There were no windows, and the door was abnormally thick.

The man went inside and remained there for half an hour. When he came out he appeared to be in good humor. An alienist might have been disturbed by the expression in the man's eyes. McWintor raised his hat toward town, shaking it and muttering:

"Spoon about my house, will you? Interfere in my affairs, huh? You wait, Mr. Smith. You just wait. Maybe you won't have to leave Saturday night. You'll go before."

Then he trudged back home. His wife was greatly surprised to find him in an amiable mood. It was so unlike



The Two Men Set Off on Their Hunting Trip.

him after a debauch. But she was glad enough to accept it at face value, being an honest and simple minded woman.

McWintor did odd jobs at the chemical laboratory in the village. He was an expert in certain departments, and occasionally the chief chemist risked the chance of sending for him.

It was noticeable that the derelict worked faithfully on these days, with the hope of continuous employment.

When afternoon came a telephone call arrived with it, and McWintor hurried off to the laboratory, rather pleased, too, to find himself temporarily placed over the man he hated so heartily.

The same amiability he had shown to his wife he now exhibited in a lesser degree toward Smith, who was rather astonished at the sudden turn of affairs.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper, Smith," said McWintor, rather solemnly. "But my nerves have gone to smash, and I'm imagining all sorts of things."

"Don't let that worry you," replied Smith, only too glad to bury the hatchet. "We all lose our tempers once in a while. But you ought to be a little more careful of that wife of yours."

"I know it"—humbly, all the while black murder in his heart. "We'll let bygones be bygones and go out some day for a hunt like we used to. There's nothing better than a good rabbit stew, and Sally knows how to cook it."

"I'd like nothing better," said the other man, believing in his heart that this new friendly attitude would aid in making one poor woman a little happier.

"I said something about you going on Saturday night. You just forget it."

"All right," said Smith.

At 5 o'clock McWintor left the laboratory and wended his way to the mysterious shack in the woods. For an hour he experimented with a peculiar sort of contrivance and from time to time gave vent to a diabolical "huckle. The man may have been a monomaniac, but that was never to be proved.

The thick door seemed to please his fancy immensely. An enormous spring



His Enemy Sinking Helplessly to the Floor.

was adroitly hidden by the hinges, such as would close the door violently and make it difficult to open without physical exertion.

The concussion was bound to shake everything in the shack. Near the ceiling was a small platform about six inches square. He propped open the door, took an empty bottle from his pocket and placed it upon this platform.

When he liberated the door the slam of it toppled the bottle from its perch and it broke into a thousand pieces on the stone slab below.

"I guess that'll fix you. I guess that'll show you whose house you're boarding in, you snake!"

McWintor loosened the spring so as to open the door and passed out.

The following morning the clerk in the laboratory whose business it was to account for all the deadlier concoctions in making his daily inventory found a bottle missing, and this bottle contained one of the deadliest fumes to existence. He was greatly perturbed.

He asked Smith, but Smith denied that he had touched the bottle. That seemed to be the end of the affair.

On Sunday Mrs. McWintor's face was brighter than it had been in weeks. Her husband seemed to be an entirely different man.

He had softened so far as to tell a comic story, and you may be sure that Smith and Mrs. McWintor laughed heartily over it.

The two men shouldered their guns, whistled for the dog and set off on their hunting trip. And only one of them returned alive.

Smith came back alone and was rather surprised to find neither McWintor nor the dog. They had separated in the woods near the shack, of which Smith apparently knew nothing.

McWintor was missing all the next day. Tuesday morning they found him in the shack strangely dead.

A very peculiar case confronted the local authorities. There was one thing quite plain to them, however, and that was McWintor had been murdered in a most cunning and diabolical manner.

Naturally the coroner's inquest drew the net about Smith's feet. He had gone out hunting with McWintor and was the last man to see him alive.

Then came the clerk, who swore that the bottle found in the shack was identical with that stolen from the laboratory where both men worked.

Smith, despite all protests, was held for the grand jury on the charge of murder in the first degree.

Other facts began to circulate. Some one had heard McWintor accuse his wife of being too friendly with Smith, and out of this calumny raised its ugly head.

Here and there men began to mutter about Judge Lynch, and Mrs. McWintor was shunned by all those who had posed as her friends.

A few days before the trial began Hassam Ali was poring over his crystal. Near by sat Zudora, reading and reflecting.

The two had been talking about Messmer and Cagliostro, and Zudora was gathering her arguments from the book she held. The bell was heard to ring.

A few moments later a visitor was ushered in by the Hindu servant. To Hassam Ali's cold eye this client did not suggest any future profit, but Mrs. McWintor's tale caught the sympathy of Zudora.

"I will take this case, uncle," she volunteered. "It interests me. It is purely circumstantial evidence, and that

is usually the most puzzling to solve. If I succeed it will add another step toward my twenty cases."

"Suit yourself," carelessly. "But remember, if it turns out to be an ordinary case it will not count."

"I accept that risk."

Zudora, in accordance with her agreement with her lover, John Storm, wrote him explaining about the case and asked him to meet her at the McWintor house the following afternoon.

When the two arrived in the village they found the suburbs in turmoil. There had been, they found, a punitive expedition against the jail that held Smith, but it had been frustrated.

"This is going to be interesting, John," said Zudora.

"I've an idea I'd like to plead for the poor devil. I never realized how many kinks there were in life until you entered this detective business."

"The unexpected is always happening. On the face of it, this man Smith looks guilty. The very fact that the woman is eager to save him has a suspicious angle. But, for all this, we may find him innocent as a child."

Meanwhile Hassam Ali had not been idle. He was going to lose no chance to further his schemes. To be sure, he had signified his utter lack of interest in the case, but that had been to hoodwink his niece.

So quietly and unobserved he made a secret investigation of the shack. It did not take his remarkably keen eyes long to discover what had taken place.

Clever, abominably clever!

Here was a criminal who had fantastic ideas. If this infernal contrivance had served one man's purpose it might readily serve another's.

So he contrived to separate Zudora and Storm and bring the matter to the shack. He wrote frankly, signing his own name and declaring that it would not be safe for Zudora to go deeply into this case, as there was more to it than could be seen on the surface.

So Storm concluded to meet Hassam Ali at the shack and find out what he had to say. He promised himself that he would be cautious and watch every move of his enemy.

Everything was ready for him, but again Hassam Ali was overanxious. He set one of the bottles he had found in a cabinet on the little platform near the ceiling.

Welcome, Mr. Storm, welcome! He laughed and his laughter might well



"What a Thick Door!"

have been an echo to that made by the man who had built this windowless shack.

By and by he heard hurrying footsteps. Silly he looked out and observed the unsuspecting attorney. Good!

But something slipped. The spring moved too soon or Hassam Ali had not pulled it back far enough. The door slammed violently.

There came a tinkle of breaking glass, and Hassam Ali struggled desperately to pull the door open. He was already too weak.

Storm heard the door. He concluded his journey at a run. It took all his strength to force the door, which immediately closed again when he was inside. He saw dimly his enemy sinking helplessly to the floor, and almost instantly it seemed that the walls of the shack had begun to revolve.

Fumes! He stumbled desperately toward the door, but could not reach it.

Doubtless the only thing that saved Hassam Ali, or Storm for that matter,

"Why, now you come to speak of it? yes, I thought he was just erratic."

"Here's a bit of good luck," said Zudora suddenly. She pointed down the road a bit where a wagon was visibly approaching. "He'll be able to give us a lift back to the village. I want to see the authorities at once. I've an idea how your husband came to die."

"How?"

"All in good time." Zudora balled the farmer. He would gladly give them a lift. "These two men," said Zudora, indicating John and Hassam Ali, "have met with an accident. Help me get them into the wagon."

"In a jiffy, miss!"

The exhausted men were bundled into the wagon, and the farmer touched his team with his whip.

At the outskirts of the town they came upon a mob. It was very disorderly. In the midst of this mob was a pale man securely bound.

"My brother! They are going to lynch him!" cried the widow wildly.

It looked that way to Zudora too. There was one thing for her to do. Into this mob she resolutely pushed her way. The excited men stepped aside grumblingly.

"Men, even if this poor man was guilty you are acting like a pack of wolves. He is innocent. I can tell you how John McWintor came to his death. He died in a trap he had set for this very man you would hang. His own dog was the cause of his death!"

"His dog?"

"Come, come; this is no time for fairy stories. String him up, boys, before the police nose in!"

Smith was backed against a tree.

"I warn you that you will be committing murder. Give me one hour, and if I cannot reasonably prove that Smith is guiltless, why, I engage to stand aside and watch you hang him."

This declaration made the more sober men pause.

"And I'll help you pull the rope!" shouted the sheriff, quick to recognize the value of a respite.

"Choose six among you to follow me," said Zudora, "or as many as you wish."

"We'll all go; Smith too!"

That settled it. The mob began to surge along the road at a dog trot. If this girl could prove what she said, why, Smith could go; if not there'd be enough trees near the shack to serve their purpose.

When the eager girl exhibited the bottles and explained what was in them, pointed to the little platform and then to the door with its spring a calm began to settle upon the blood-thirsty men.

"To hold the door open against the pressure of the spring it was necessary to prop this log against it. McWintor and Smith had gone out hunting. Suddenly Smith missed McWintor, who was, in fact, arranging the details of the trap. McWintor's dog evidently got in his way, and he kicked it. The dog in his endeavor to escape a second kick bumped against the log, shutting McWintor in the shack and causing the poisonous fumes to be liberated. My uncle has already proved this fact to his satisfaction."

Hassam Ali nodded gravely. There was nothing else for him to do. Storm stared at him ironically for a moment.

"But there is something else to add," went on Zudora, now satisfied that she had won the interest of the mob.

"McWintor had laid this trap for Smith himself. He was an insane man, and none of you ever suspected



The Eager Girl Pointed to the Little Platform.

was the second opening of the door, which let in a gust of pure air and carried out a certain volume of the poison.

Fortunately for both of them Zudora and Mrs. McWintor were both starting out for the shack at the very moment the door closed upon Hassam Ali.

Mrs. McWintor dreaded to see the fatal shack again, but Zudora insisted. She must see the shack and everything in it if she was to aid Smith in the slightest degree.

After Mrs. McWintor had fully explained the conditions Zudora was quite confident that the man Smith was innocent, no matter how deeply circumstantial evidence had involved him.

She also felt instinctively that the widow was holding something back.

"There it is," announced Mrs. McWintor, with a shudder.

"Why, there are no windows in it!"

"I know it. My husband built it for what purpose I cannot say, unless it was to experiment in."

Mrs. McWintor began to cry.

"There, there," said Zudora. "From what you have told me I don't think that husband of yours was worth tears."

"But I have not told you all."

"Well, what more is there to tell?"

"The man accused of my husband's death was never my lover. He was my brother!"

"Good heavens! Why didn't you tell that to the coroner?"

"I dared not. I dared not tell even my husband that."

"Why?"

"My brother is an escaped convict. Again it was circumstantial evidence. He suffered in another man's place for two years he has lived quietly here, and the police have lost all track of him. He was sentenced for five years and escaped during the first year of his term. If I had taken my husband into my confidence he would have enjoyed nothing greater than exposing George."

"You can trust me with your secret. He would be totally lost if the people knew this. Well, there's the shack. What a thick door!"

Reaching it, she tried to open it. It refused to budge. She called to Mrs. McWintor, and the two of them succeeded in pressing it back.

"Hold it!" cried Zudora, reaching for a log near at hand. With this she was able to hold the door.

Then she saw Storm and Hassam Ali lying senseless on the floor. She sniffed and for a moment felt dizzy.

The fresh air, however, came in strongly, and after a few moments the two men dazedly opened their eyes.

Zudora helped them both outside, shaking them roughly. It took a quarter of an hour to bring them around to anything like normality. Whatever Storm thought of the affair he kept to himself.

Zudora, believing it wise to close the door again, was about to cast aside the log when her eye was attracted by a tuft of coarse hair caught in a splinter.

"Did your husband have a dog?" she asked the frightened woman at her side.

"Yes. But he ran away the day my husband died, and no one has seen him since."

Zudora again studied the log thoughtfully. The earth about was soft, and presently she discovered the footprints of a dog. The tuft of hair and the tracks set her thinking deeply.

"Was your man quite right?" she asked, touching her forehead.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean did he act queerly at times?"

"He is innocent."

this fact. He imagined all his troubles. Smith had absolutely nothing to do with them. Now hang him if you can!"

The mob quietly took itself off, vastly shamed and chastened, and Smith soothed his sobbing sister, his eyes full of gratitude.

"You're a wonderful little person, Zudora," whispered Storm.

"Am I? Take me back to town. I am tired. And there's more to do. I've got to free Smith again—from prison."

But the death of the real culprit did that, and Smith walked the earth again a free citizen.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A Ruse That Failed.

Comedian - White Ravenyelp was traveling in Italy he thought it would be a great press agent stunt to get himself captured by bandits and held for ransom.

Soubrette - How did the scheme work?

Comedian - Robbers captured him all right, but when they found he was an actor they made him work for his board.—Judge.

Bad conduct soils the finest ornament more than dirt.—Plautus.