

# 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. Zudora 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 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 him. 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.

John McWinter, endeavoring to trap and kill George Smith, is killed himself, and Smith is charged with murder. Hassam Ali conspires to have John Storm meet the same fate as McWinter, and he and Storm are overcome by powerful fumes. Zudora saves them, proves that McWinter's own dog trapped and killed him and saves Smith from a band of lynchers.

An inventor blows up a submarine with a powerful heat ray which he sends through water. Hassam Ali sends Zudora to a photographer directly beneath the inventor's laboratory and orders the inventor to kill her. Zudora gets a warning, and her life is saved. The heat ray machine is destroyed, and the photographer, after a quarrel with Hassam Ali, is found dead in the river.

Wu Chang prevents Zudora's elopement with John Storm by hypnotizing her, and he and Hassam Ali attempt to smuggle her out of the country. This plot is frustrated by Storm.

### CHAPTER IX.

#### The Missing Heir.

THERE was something strange about this man Hassam Ali. There were times when he seemed young, times when he seemed old, careworn, broken. Zudora thought nothing of these subtle changes, however. Her mind was occupied with other affairs. But Hassam Ali's servant knew what it signified, and he hoarded his savings against that day when he would have no master. For a long time he knew that it was not Hassam Ali who went forth from the mystic room, but Hassam Ali's double, and a very dangerous double, had Hassam Ali known.

The man was fond of money, though he was not quite the miser Hassam was. But often, while in the mystic room, going through the mummy he disliked and despised, he could hear the real Hassam counting his gold.



Zudora Was an Extremely Attractive Young Woman.

which Baird determined some day to get hold of. He lived in the house directly back of the mystic house, and

there was a secret tunnel between the two houses.

In the beginning he had followed out Hassam Ali's orders without any particular notice of the victim, but after the affair of Wu Chang, Baird awoke to the fact that Zudora was an extremely attractive young woman. Thus his interest in doing away with John Storm began to have something more than a negligible interest. But Zudora! That was another matter after he began to recognize that his heart beat faster whenever she came into his presence. It was fortunate that Hassam Ali was by nature cold and undemonstrative in the matter of bestowing affection. Baird longed to touch her, but, knowing his part, dared not.

Hassam Ali's long black hair was, as Zudora very well knew, nothing but a wig. Except that Baird's skin was a little fresher, he and Hassam Ali might easily have posed as twins. There was no occasion for Zudora, then, to look upon this substitute for her uncle with suspicion. She began to suspect seriously his attitude, but not his personality. So Baird banked the fires in his eyes and endeavored to think of her as little as possible. But thoughts are masters, and they lead us whither they will.

One day he entered the secret chamber at the foot of the shaft to confer with the real Hassam Ali, who lay upon a cot.

"How do you feel today?"

"Badly," said Zudora's uncle. "You have failed three times."

"I have done no better, no worse, than you, if that is what you mean," said Baird without much humility. "I have told you that Zudora bears a charmed life. Luck is always with her, and John Storm stands at present in the light of this luck."

"You are a fool, Baird!" snarled the sick man. "You are falling in love with Zudora. I may be ill, but I am not blind. She is not for you. Don't waste your valuable time with any thought like that. I tell you she must die. I hate her!"

"You have promised that if you should die what you have would become mine," said Baird. "You have promised to make me your heir. I have seen that will, but wills can be torn up and rewritten."

Hassam Ali rubbed his hands together. "So they can," he said, "so they can. I don't quite like the tone you use today. Do you think I am moribund? Are you looking speculatively at my shoes? Jim, if you make the least misstep I'll break you as easily as I could a church warden pipe. Amed knows and my attorney knows. If I disappear mysteriously and don't return—Hassam Ali drew his finger around his throat suggestively.

"But if I rid you of this girl what are you going to do with all that gold—millions? You're a miser, and we both know it."

"Perhaps I want the gold to play with," grinned Hassam Ali. "I had no playthings when I was a child; I was too poor. Go along, I've talked enough," peevishly.

"There is another little secret," said Baird.

"Oh, there is? And what might it be?"

"Diamonds."

Hassam Ali sat up stiffly. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Zudora's father once had a partner who went to Brazil. This partner found brilliant diamonds of a high order. She has a half interest in this mine with out knowing such a thing exists."

Hassam Ali lay back. "I have warned you. Now go and send Ahmed with my tea."

Baird returned to the mystic room, his mind awfully with a thousand schemes. He played his little comedy with Zudora, saw some patients, and later took the evening paper. Upon the front page he read a bit of news that interested him. The Van Wick child, heir to the Van Wick millions, had been kidnapped despite all the precautionary measures to prevent such a catastrophe.

"So they've done it!" he mused aloud, unthinkingly.

"Done what?" asked Zudora.

"Kidnaped the Van Wick child. There may be a little work for us, my child—a little work for us. I think that I'll go downtown and make a few investigations before they come to us."

For one thing, he wanted to get away from Zudora. All these thoughts of her were crowding dangerously near action. A misstep at this time would bring his house of cards tumbling about his head. He proceeded to a house situated in a semifashionable district and rang for admittance. The servant admitted him without question. This house was the residence of a woman who called herself Mme. Du Val. The fall of her late confederate, Wu Chang, the hypnotic opium smuggler, had not implicated her. She had made her escape before the police had battered their way into the Chang house.

She came into the drawing room to find Baird, sans wig and makeup; in fact, himself. He was in the middle thirties, and certain kinds of women would call him fascinating.

"Jim?"

"Yes. So you've accomplished the feat in spite of the private detectives?"

"What do you mean?" innocently.

"Come, come, Nora; between you and me there should be no secrets. I mean the Van Wick child. You've got him."

"So we have. And it will take a hundred thousand to get him back. I'm getting a little tired of this career. I want enough to live in simple comfort in France. Do you know, Jim, that you are a fine looking man?"

Baird shrugged.

"And that if you'll listen to me this girl Zudora shall vanish so completely that she'll be as hard to find as a puff of smoke? And when that is done by by to Hassam Ali, whom I've always hated. He's as cold blooded as a fish. Millions, boy, for both of us! Travel and luxury!"

She sat down beside the man. She was unobtainably handsome, but Baird had seen tigers equally as handsome. And even as he gazed upon her the dreamy face of Zudora seemed to flit past.

"But there is one man we must get rid of absolutely before we make any attempt upon the girl," he said.

"Storm? You will never get him except through Zudora. With the girl as a lure you can bring Storm into any kind of a spider web."

Baird felt himself pulled in two ways. To even hint to this woman that he desired to shield Zudora for purposes of his own would be the signing of Zudora's death warrant. And yet he needed Mme. Du Val, for she had control of an organization whose ramifications reached across the continent. He wanted John Storm out of the way, and Mme. Du Val was the one ultimately to accomplish this.

"Well, what is your plan in regard to Zudora?" he asked curiously.

"I could very easily send Zudora off on the same train with the Van Wick child."

"Ah, yes. That is easy enough to say. But how to get her to the train?"

"She does not know me. At least I don't think she saw me at Chicago. I will give a ball. Oh, you need not smile. I live two lives, if you will. In

my own home I am a woman of comfortable income, who indulges in mystics as a pastime. Many noted people come to my house. And I've an idea of one way of bringing Zudora. I will send her an invitation. You will urge her to come, but not insistently. She will then receive an anonymous note saying that if she wishes to know what has become of the Van Wick boy she will find the information at my house. Oh, nothing will point to me. I know my business."

"I'll have to admit that," said Baird, listening. When he had these chats with Mme. Du Val he was not always sure that there was not a third person somewhere near. But he never committed himself, never confessed that he was not Hassam Ali. In certain degrees he admired this handsome woman, but there was always a bit of fear of her. "Your idea isn't a bad one."

"I'll give the ball on a chance, any day. It is up to you, Jim, if you wish to make use of the idea."

Alone, the woman smiled. It was not a pleasant smile. There was no man in the world who could fool her. Baird was falling in love with Zudora, and was to the little fool for crossing her path, even if unconscious. She wanted Jim Baird for her own, and she was determined to clear the path of all obstacles in his direction. Zudora of the scene, she was quite confident that her own powers of attraction would not fall upon barren ground.

The Van Wick family was distracted. Despite precautions that had cost thousands, the boy had been stolen. The father knew that to recover the boy he would have to dig deep into his purse. That he was willing enough to do, but what he wanted to be sure of was that the payment should be final. He did not wish to be hounded and pursued by that terror of uncertainty, of suspense. He was willing to pay in pride and money, but he wanted security and peace in return.

The police were scouring the city, but they found not the slightest clue to the whereabouts of the boy or of the perpetrator or the abductors. After a week of misery some friend suggested that the services of one Hassam Ali, the mystic detective, or the services of his niece should be secured. The father was reluctant, for he held all these mystics as contemptible mountebanks who thrived upon the credulity of fools. But the metropolitan police had failed, and he was not

a man to leave any stone unturned to recover his boy, the apple of his eye.

So he and Mrs. Van Wick decided to pay Hassam Ali a visit. They summoned the car and started out for Hassam Ali's house. Zudora impressed them both far more than the mystic himself.

"Do you think you can help us?"

"My niece will see what she can do so," said Hassam Ali, or rather Hassam Ali's double.

"But a young woman!" said Van Wick doubtfully.

Hassam Ali laughed. "She may look fragile, but wire looks fragile."

"But these men are desperate characters."

"And will be the last people in the world to suspect a fragile young woman of being on their trail."

"Don't worry over the fact that I am a woman," said Zudora, smiling. "I can take care of myself. I have been able to do so thus far. If it is possible to find the boy I'll do it."

"And remember," said the father, "there is no depth to my pocketbook so far as that boy is concerned. But God help those dastards if they are cruel to him! Well, we'll trust the case to you, Miss—Miss—"

"Keene," said Zudora. "Zudora Keene."

"Good luck, and God bless you, Zudora Keene," said the mother.

"Poor thing!" said Zudora, when the parents had gone. "The most despicable being in the world is a kidnaper. It is a vile game; and these men should suffer the exact fate of murderers. Think of the little boy, suddenly bereft of mother love, surrounded by strange, menacing faces! It is horrible!"

The pseudo uncle looked at her with strange fires in his eyes. He admitted that kidnaping was a low crime so far as taking children away from their parents and holding them for ransom, with threats of mutilation or death. He did not add, however, that between kidnaping and abduction there was a wide difference in significance. The truth is, Baird was wearying of this game he was playing. He wanted to be himself, to play a game of his own; he was young, and he wanted the liberty that went with youth. There was no doubt in his mind that Keene, the real Hassam Ali, was dying. He might

live for several months, but nevertheless he had his ticket for the long journey. Baird determined to play the game out to the end; for Hassam Ali had promised him a handsome bit of money for his loyalty. He had seen the will, but not without a certain doubt. Wills could be destroyed quite as easily as they could be made.

When Zudora received the invitation to Mme. Du Val's ball she was puzzled. She had among her acquaintance no woman of that name. But she found her name in the blue book and decided to attend out of mere curiosity. She called up Storm and asked his advice and was surprised to learn that he had been invited also.

"I think we'd better ignore it," he advised.

"But I have so little amusement!" she pleaded. "And it will be a lark for both of us."

"All right, sweetheart; we'll go. Indeed, I'd like to find out why we both were invited."

Zudora went about the house next day humming. So long as John was going she was bound to have a good time at the Du Val ball. It would be as she had said, a lark. Then came the mysterious note warning her to keep away from the Du Val house, and this note was signed, "From one who knows where the Van Wick boy is."

Nothing, Zudora determined, could keep her away now. Even in this short time it was evident that the kidnapers had heard that her services had been engaged, and it looked as if they feared she would pick up some information at the Du Val ball. Of this note she said nothing to either Storm or her uncle.

On the night of the ball she was rather surprised to learn that Hassam Ali was also going.

"But were you invited, uncle?"

"I was, indeed. I wrote and asked for an invitation," said Baird blandly. "Is Storm going to call here for you?"

"He is."

"In spite of my protests?"

"He will not be accepting your hospitality. He will merely wait until I come down. And it would be a very gracious act on your part, Uncle Frank, to go with us."

"And have a dustup in the cab?" ironically.

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To the Arms of John Storm.

Any one who called Hassam Ali contemptible had at least some attribute in common with himself.

"I will inquire if the young lady has been to the dressing room," said Mme. Du Val, moving off.

But Zudora's cloak and scarf were still on the bed in the dressing room. That was enough for Storm. He left the house immediately and drove to police headquarters.

Upon his departure from the Du Val house Baird resumed his Hassam Ali disguise and returned home. Zudora was his. He concluded to make his patron a visit. The real Hassam Ali was evidently sinking. To Baird's eyes the mask of death already lay upon the pinched features; the mind alone was vigorous.

"Keene, you are on your deathbed."

"Am I indeed?" ironically. A bit of coughing followed, and Hassam Ali writhed upon his cot.

The Hassam Ali standing over him frowned.

"Where is the will?" he asked.

"Do you wish to murder me?"

"In God's name, no. But you are dying, and I've done all your work on promises of the future. You know that you are dying."

"Where is Zudora?"

"She is in the hands of Mme. Du Val."

"You will be a pauper, my man, if you fall this time. She must die, die!"

"No, she shall not die. You are not a human being; you are a fiend! Zudora shall not die for the simple fact that I have grown to love her!"

"Grown to love her?" Keene fell back, looking as if he were really dead this time.

Baird left the chamber, angry with himself for having given the old scoundrel a glimpse of his heart. But he was dying, there was no doubt of it at all.

Zudora, together with the Van Wick boy, were taken away from the basement where they had been confined, and from the whispers floating about Zudora understood that they were to be conveyed to a ship of some sort. She understood for thought she did now; she had been lured to the Du Val place for the purpose of abduction. The scoundrels who had kidnaped the Van Wick child feared her. Whether Mme. Du Val had any place in the affair she was not ready to determine, but it was rather odd that a good woman should live in a house with secret rooms and exits.

It was through a simple countryman's alarm that Zudora and the child were brought back to the world again. The old man had read about the abduction, and the sight of a pathetic little boy being carried aboard a canoe on a siding was enough to set his suspicion into lively action. He telephoned the police, who in turn warned the metropolitan force. And that is how Storm and the detectives arrived in time to prevent the catastrophe.

The kidnapers put up a strenuous battle, and nearly all of them were captured, Baird alone escaping. But strange to relate, Baird had taken sides with the police. In reality it signified that the turn in the road had taken place. Baird wanted to be good, wanted to go back to the world again with clean hands and guard the woman he had sworn to love. It dug into his very soul to turn this woman over to the arms of John Storm, but he did so.

That night Hassam Ali died in his little cell, and with him died his double, for never again would Baird don that black shining wig which he hated.

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Tomorrow your Zudora will be just where you want her.

lifted up and carried through a secret passageway. Then she smelled the sickish odor of chloroform, and after that—blankness. When she came to she was in a small room. She was still blindfolded, but her ears were alive, and she could hear the plaintive sobbing of a child.

Meantime Storm returned with the