

# ZUDORA A Great Mystic Story

## HAROLD MACGRATH

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**THE MYSTERY OF THE SPOTTED COLLAR.**

ON the side of a rugged mountain a black velvet howl raged. Rubble lay strewn all about the ledge. To a layman this rubble would have explained nothing; to a miner it would instantly have explained the nature of the hole. Presently a burly man emerged from the hole, quivering. He eyed the lump of quartz in his hand. It was a little, but never quite enough gold to make it worth while. It might run ten or twelve times the ton. But what capitalist would interest himself in such trifles? The prospector flung the quartz wearily upon the accumulating rubble and leaned disheartenedly against the log support to the entrance of the mine. Every bone in his body ached and every nerve responded. His grubstake was fast dwindling and in another four days he would have to hike some thirty-two miles to the nearest town for supplies.

Donovan! He had paid \$500, every one of them earned at the risk of his neck, for this assumable hole in the ground. He filled and lit his pipe and fell to dreaming what he would do when he struck it rich. By and by the dreams faded and the bitter realities returned. He rose lamely and carefully picked his way down to the Irishman's shanty. The two of them shared their usual meals on pleasant days.

"How's she coming?"

"Same old story," answered Traitor, erstwhile strong man of the Hellgate circus. "Well, well, it's peaglin' away that brings me! I got a lump today that don't look so bad. I should say that she'll run fifteen to ten. I guess them wild-catters are fit chaps that make the real spoudulix—widders an' perks an' childer."

Traitor shrugged and manched his slice of bacon and after an hour or so returned to his diggings.

In Traitor's life there had been but trifling amonoties. He had been a sailor in the South seas, a lumberjack in the north, a cow-puncher, a fireman on a North Atlantic liner. He had come from a poor but respectable Ohio family. His father nor his grandfather had ever stepped over the state boundary lines, but in him there was a rebellion to the type of pioneer who had established the Traitor family when Ohio was a wilderness. He could not settle down; he must be on the move continually, and when at length he joined the circus he found that roving uncertain life much to his fancy. There he had met Mimi Keene, known on the hand bills for lithographs were for beyond the reach of this circus as Mimi La France, world renowned tight rope walker. Remarkable as it might seem, these two loved each other fondly, and one day the lust to wander died in the man's heart; and he wanted a roof over his head, children about his knees, and money in his purse. When the opportunity to go hunting for gold came, he hesitated not an instant.

He had been hammering away at the grits overlooking trips for slight mouths, making only such trips to town as were necessary for food. Perhaps the rubble extracted represented a thousand dollars, perhaps less. He was discouraged.

One day he staggered out into the brilliant sunshine. A lump of quartz was clutched tightly in his hand. When he grew accustomed to the dazzling light he turned the stone over and over, his heart beating as it had never before. There was value in it, broad sheets of it; gold, gold, gold! He stood there several minutes, enthralled, with a jumble of dreams revolving around in his brain. Then he let out a yell that could be heard across the valley. Down the rubble he dashed, rickling his neck a dozen times.

"Donovan! Donovan!" he cried.

The old Irish prospector came out of his hole, blinking.

"I've got it! I've got it!"

Donovan snatched the quartz from the hand of his friend.

"Holy Virgin, ye've struck it! If it's all like that, ye'er a rich man. Maa, man, there's a hundred dollars in that lump alone!"

Traitor collapsed on a pile of worthless rubble and laid his head on his arms. He had done it, all in these few months. He was rich, rich. And all his dreams were going to come true! The Irishman gazed down at him ruefully but philosophically.

"An' me that's been prospectin' twenty years an' ain't hit my pile yet! Well, God bless ye, man, I'm glad ye got it. An' now let's go take a look."

Like all men who suddenly stumble upon a virgin fortune, Traitor instantly began to plan how to protect it. He had some bank attorneys draw up papers leaving the mine in his wife, in case of her death to his child, to her husband. It was slightly understood that the brother-in-law, Keene, should never be able to touch it. These western bank attorneys were simple and honest men.

But no dream of hers ever becomes rounded out; what we realize is but a poor fragment. Before he had time to write to his wife, Traitor was killed by a premature explosion. He was buried under the rubble his own hands had torn from the mountain's side; and the kindly Donovan started out to find the Hellgate circus.

The caravan was at that time 200 miles to the south, about to turn in for the winter. But Donovan found it. By mistake he stumbled into the man's dressing tent. A young man with shrewd dark eyes and a stouter twist to the corner of his lips, laid his hand on Donovan's shoulder.

"How'd you get in here?"

"Why, I walked in," said Donovan amiably.

"Suppose you walk out again?"

"Keep yer hair on, bub. I'm here on business. I'm lookin' for Mimi La France, 's they call her outside. She walks tight ropes."

"Well, I'm her brother. What do you want with her?"

"So ye'er Traitor's brother-in-law?"

"Traitor?" said the young man, a die hating his eyes. "Do you come from him?"

"Yes. An' my message is to his wife."

"Oh. That's his kid there."

"Y' don't say so! Well, him o' looks like him."

"Here's my sister now."

Donovan saw a slight woman, of pretty figure and comely features. She came through the flap which separated the women's dressing tent from the men's. She looked a bit tired and careworn. The old miner, having had but little to do with women folk, was not able to discern, under the richly yellow glare of the lamps, the air of distinction which marked Mimi Traitor as different from her kind. The Keene family had come from good stock, but had fallen in evil days. She ran instantly to the baby.

"Here's a man from John, Mimi," said the brother earnestly.

The young woman rushed over to Donovan and began shaking his hands. How was her man? Had he struck it rich? Did he want her to quit and go to him?

Donovan began to swallow with difficulty. How was he going to tell her? He wanted to run away. He could now readily understand why Traitor had always talked of Mimi, Mimi, Mimi, until his cattle ears had tired of the name. She was a good wife and a good mother, for all that she was a circus performer. And here he was, aiming to break her heart! Still, there was a bit of curiosity in his makeup. "The new fortune might console her."

But it did not. On the contrary, when, half an hour after learning of the death of the man she loved, she mounted the wire, a vertigo seized her, she lost her balance and fell, and by the time the men had laid away the big top she was dead.

For the first time in his wandering, futile life Frank Keene felt his throat contract and an unbidden moisture fill his eyes. After a fashion he had loved his clean minded, loyal little sister. And now she was gone, leaving him with a baby on his hands, more adept in dealing from the bottom of the deck than from the top.

"How much is the mine worth?" he asked when the simple funeral was over.

"Lord knows," said Donovan; "but it's the biggest strike in twenty years. But it's goin' to be tied up till this little chick's 18. Don't ye worry, though. The lawyers'll see to it that ye get enough to take care o' the child, eddies it, an' all that."

"What's the name of the mine?"

"Same as the kiddie's—Zudora."

The two separated, never to meet again.

The years passed. Keene dabbled in all manner of shady trades and finally drifted into a lucrative business. It was not only the easiest but the safest way—to attract gulls and pluck them. He set up as a Hindu mystic, a Swami. He told fortunes, did crystal gazing, reoriented souls, and as a by-product plived detective with more or less success. He rarely practiced this latter game except among his favored gulls. It was a simple matter to instruct some of his confederates to rob certain of his clients; it was equally a simple matter to recover the stolen objects—for a suitable reward. Keene eventually became known to the cult as Hassam Ali, and under that name his fame grew. The checks from the Zudora were now applied wholly to the welfare of his niece.

The child grew. Her education began. She gave promise of great beauty, even in the lack and gawky age. Her uncle often found himself vaguely speculating over her future. There was in his mind a thought, nebulous but insistent, and as often as he repelled it as often it returned. It was not a happy thought.

Hassam Ali had begun to love gold, the bright, shining metal; not in the abstract but in the concrete. To touch it with his fingers was transport; no synonym of Bach's was half so fine as the chink-clink of the coins, the eagle and the double eagle, as they fell upon each other, slipping from his hands.

From her eighteenth birthday up to her eighteenth Zudora noted a subtle change in the manner of her uncle. He became coldly aloof, rarely touched her affectionately, was moody and tactless. Familiar as she was with all the paraphernalia of the mystic, she still retained unbounded faith in her uncle's powers. Indeed, he was a hypnotist of unusual power and was roughly skilled in the science of medicine. Zudora had practiced the former art until she was almost as proficient as her master. It never occurred to her that her uncle's means of existence were unethical and generally those of a cheat. Famous actresses and society women visited him, and not a few notable bankers and financiers came to him for advice. But the general public held Hassam Ali in tolerant contempt and the police with an little suspicion.

The inner shrine of this equivoal temple was draped with black velvet, and there were secret doors about which even Zudora knew nothing. There was the inevitable dais, and before this a huge crystal globe in which Hassam Ali saw the past and the future as revealed by his victim. It was easy to draw the past and it was not difficult to draw the future. The future in this globe was nearly always what the victim wished. Hence the popularity of Hassam Ali, late of the Hellgate circus, taker and card sharp, chief of a band of most clever and ingenious criminals. And

Zudora wandered in and out of this iniquitous maze as a wild dove might have flown over a pestilential swamp, untouched and unknowing. As the other great stranger in Hassam Ali the evil thought previously referred to became more and more insistent. Zudora must die. When he faced this inevitability for the first time he was genuinely horrified. He was her uncle, her mother had been his sister, the girl was his flesh and blood. But the constant recurrence of an evil desire gradually lessens the abhorrence of it. Today in Hassam Ali's mind there remained no shades of conscience, only a desire to accomplish the deed without in any manner directing suspicion toward him. So to this one object he now turned the brilliant powers of his abnormally evil mind. Zudora must die. But how?

In a few days she would be 18. On that day she would become enormously rich. He must rid himself of her before she had time to appreciate what the power of money meant.



YES I KILLED HIM BUT ANOTHER.

But how? In what subtle, cunning manner that would make it impossible for the law to trace the deed to him? And there was so other obstacle rising slowly but surely and fearfully over the horizon. Love, Youth and the necessity of love, these menaced the plans of Hassam Ali. He had tolerated this keen eyed, clean lived young lawyer, John Storm, because he had in a way relieved him of the trial of finding entertainment for Zudora. The time had come for Storm to be sent about his business.

One night, while he was dreaming over the past, marveling over the strange crust of cynicism which overlay his sense of moral obligation, Hassam saw his way. Zudora was interested in detective work and had often begged to be allowed to use her powers of logical deduction. Zudora should play the detective to her heart's content, and if she met with some terrible accident who would be the wiser?

Twenty millions in gold!

His hands opened and shut spasmodically, indistinctly he heard a rustle of petitions. He opened his eyes to find his niece at his feet.

"Uncle, don't you know what day this is?" she asked.

"Why, it is Wednesday."

"Have you forgotten that this is my eighteenth birthday?"

"Eighteenth birthday? Good heavens, so it is, so it is!"

He laid his hand upon her dark head, but he did not look down into the youthful and beautiful face raised toward his own. His fingers unconsciously crept into the girl's hair, a trifle too strongly for an affectionate gesture.

"What is it?" she asked, drawing her head away quickly.

"A touch of rheumatism in my arm," he said tentatively. "You know it gives me a twinge once in so often. So you are 18 years old?"

"And you said that on this day I was to come into a fortune."

"That is true. How much do you think it is?"

"O, perhaps fifty thousand dollars."

He laughed. Then he got up and began to walk the floor. She watched him curiously. He was plainly agitated about something. After awhile he paused before her.

"Is it . . . lost?" she asked.

"No, my child. It is the terrible responsibility which is about to rest upon your young shoulders that makes me sad. Tomorrow morning your lawyers will inform you that

you are one of the richest heiresses in America."

"Uncle, don't make fun of me!" reproached fully.

"I am telling you the truth. To date Zudora has turned out something like twenty millions. It was the express wish of your father to have this kept quiet so that you would not be bothered with fortune hunters. Girl, you will marry a duke or a prince. You will become a famous beauty. But my advice is this: that until my guardianship ceases—you will be 21 then—you will say nothing to any one about this fortune. It would make life unbearable for us both."

"I'll gladly agree to that," she said eagerly.

"Whenever you require a large sum of money you will write the attorneys and they will send it. Think of the notoriety, the busy reporters, the broken down nobles, indigenous society folk!"

She gazed at the picture. He was right. She laughed at the picture. He was right.

Good evening!" Storm sent Zudora a reassuring smile as he left the room.

Certainly he would not have smiled had he seen Hassam Ali's mind at that moment.

"What in the world have you against John?" cried Zudora bewilderedly.

"I do not propose to see you support a fortune hunter," rather lamely.

"That's nonsense," she declared with spirit. "John tells the truth when he says he is able to take care of me."

"Still, I found it, and legally it is my right."

"But I love him. I would not trade him for the greatest prince in Christendom. And if I cannot marry him, I'll marry no one."

"Well, well," said Hassam Ali, apparently relenting; "if you take such a stand I'll compromise."

She gazed at him eagerly.

"Solve my next twenty cases and you can marry him; fall in any single case and you must renounce him."

Zudora agreed instantly, even joyously. For a long time she had been seized with the desire to play the detective, and her uncle had often admitted that her powers of logical deduction were remarkable in a woman who, philosophers claimed, was without the faculty of sustained reasoning.

"Is it really a bargain?" with all the confidence of youth.

"It is. If you're willing to risk the dangers for the sake of a man like Storm, why the choice is yours."

Then he left her.

There was little love lost between Storm and Zudora. They had clashed a dozen times during the past year; and once or twice they had almost come to blows. On the last day they came together in the courtroom, just before the noon recess. Zudora threw discretion to the winds and hurled a low epithet at his rival, who swiftly retaliated by striking the German across the face with the brief he held in his hand.

A tremendous confusion ensued and from her seat in the gallery Zudora viewed the scene with alarm. This man Zudora was an athletic bully. He had been in America but a few years and he still held to the German view regarding a blow in the face. He hastily scribbled a note which he shoved toward Storm. The latter read it, shrugged and nodded affirmatively. All might have gone well but for the fact that an enterprising reporter found the discarded note and made a great scoop for his paper. Zudora had challenged Storm to a duel and the latter had hotly agreed, despite the fact that he knew nothing of swords and was a very indifferent pistol shot.

And Hassam Ali found a way to dispose of John Storm.

And Zudora thought she had found a way to save him. She found him in the cellar, bravely trying to hit a bull's-eye target. It would have been laughable under any other circumstance. He was not to be stirred, however. And when she threatened him with the pulvis he laughed. He knew the position of the target, he would refuse to take the affront seriously. Storm laid down his revolver and took a drink of water. Then he picked up the revolver and began pecking away. Unobserved, she dragged the drinking water. There would be no duel that night. Again she pleaded, but Storm was firm. She pretended to give up and departed, weeping.

The next morning Zudora was found dead in her library, strangled, and John Storm, in a dazed condition, disheveled, was arrested on the street, charged with murder.

Hassam Ali, in his capacity of criminal investigator, accompanied by Zudora, entered with the police the scene of the crime.

"Well, my child," said he, "here is your first case. Let us see if you can handle it."

Zudora, having a double favorite, ran over to the dead man. On the floor she found a scarf pin, some small change, and she noticed that his collar hung by the rear button. She hurriedly wrapped these three articles in her handkerchief. The peculiar green spots on this collar had aroused her curiosity.

She was very unhappy. The drug she had given her lover had not put him to sleep; it had merely sent him wandering about the streets throughout the night, in a blank state of mind. He would not be able to account for his time, and she might plead in vain that she had given him a sleeping potion to keep him in his house until all chance to fight Zudora was gone.

Several days passed. Storm rapped in his cell. Truth to tell, he wasn't sure that he hadn't killed his enemy. From the moment Zudora left him until he found himself in jail, he could remember nothing. When she told him what she had done, he smiled and forgave her.

"But you've got me into a pretty pickle, little girl, and you'll have to get me out of it."

"I will."

The marks on the collar were pencil marks and they bothered her. Often she flung the collar vehemently from her, but she always went back to it. One day she found something on the floor in the library. At that moment she attached no significance to the find.

Zigzag pencil lines on the collar. How had they come there? Before the crime? That was not quite possible. The German had been occupationally used in his attire. She invariably sought what was known as the mystic room when confronted by any serious problem. No sound ever reached there. A green parrot swung on a perch. He was very old and was doubtless the repository of

many a strange secret. Once he muttered: "Let's get him!" Zudora thought this rather odd and began quizzing the old bird. But he refused to speak further.

Near the dais stood a mechanical affair constructed something after the manner of a plow. It consisted of two tubes of glass which revolved in opposite directions, filled with a brilliant diffusing violet light. This little invention was Hassam Ali's own. Today Zudora tried it on the green parrot, but the winking lights simply blinded the bird of his perch. She picked him up and relieved him and soon forgot all about him in these renewed interest in the spotted collar. Idly she imitated the marks with the stub of pencil. . . . And then, as if the whole world had suddenly lighted up, Zudora at last understood how Hassam Ali had come to his death.

When the trial began it looked very badly for John Storm. The altercation with the decedent in court was reviewed, the dueling challenge, their previous enmity, the twelve unaccountable hours. In the balcony Hassam Ali and the men Burns watched the proceedings with something more than normal interest. When the jury finally received the judge's instructions, every one conceded that John Storm was a lost man; nothing could save him from the chair.

Suddenly, up the aisle toward the judge's desk came a called woman.

"Stop!" she cried; "it was I—I!"

Then she faintly. The judge, the attorneys, the reporters, the spectators, all rose in their amazement. A woman! After the tableau came confusion and chaos. The judge signed to the jury to return to their chairs.

Storm, despite the deputy sheriff, pushed his way to the woman's side and swiftly raised the veil.

"Zudora?" He turned resolutely to the judge. "Your honor, there is some mistake. This young woman has had nothing to do with the death of Bleureith. It is utterly impossible!"

"That remains to be seen, Mr. Storm. Return to the docket, if you please!"

"But she is innocent!"

"Deputies!" called the judge sternly. He was sorry for Storm; but duty was duty, none the less.

The court was eventually cleared. Storm was taken back to his cell. Hassam Ali and Burns went away together. Immediately Zudora sought the office of the district attorney, whom she found haranguing with the counsel for the defense.

"If I can convince you two gentlemen will that be sufficient?" she asked.

"It will," affirmed the district attorney. "But why can't you give us the man's name now?" he asked pertinently. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that John Storm had committed the crime. District attorneys all over this broad land have the faculty of seeing every man guilty until he is proved innocent, which is quite the contrary to the letter of the law.

"To tell his name now would spoil every thing," declared Zudora. "I have no evidence at this moment that would hold in law, but I'll guarantee to place it in your hands before midnight. You will come secretly to my house and I will expose your heinous crime, and there you will hear the evidence from the man's own lips."

"Very well," said the district attorney. "But I warn you that any kind of unusual munner will not pass as evidence."

Zudora flushed a little. She knew that the general public held their breath in expectation. They would never realize what a wonderfully clever man he was.

"Do you see this pencil?" she asked, exhibiting a stub.

"Yes."

"It is the one. It is given, I believe, not a common everyday pencil. Like a school boy's, it has a hole in its band which attracts Bleureith. Why, none of his small know unless he can be made to tell."

At 9 o'clock a man entered the mystic room. He looked puzzled.

"You wished to see me?" he said to Zudora.

"Yes. Please sit down, Mr. Burns."

Above, unknown to either, the deep lined face of Hassam Ali appeared. In his hand he held a revolver with a Masonic emblem. As has been said, the mystic room measured a dozen square feet. From this open one it was Hassam Ali's habit to take stock of his victims before meeting them personally. He waited.

Zudora began to ask business questions. Burns eyed her restlessly. Suddenly she sprung the trap. She held up the pencil.

"This is yours. I saw you writing with it. It fell to the floor where I found it. It is the same pencil that marked the collar of Bleureith in his death struggles."

Burns jumped to his feet. Zudora did likewise, throwing on the power which set the god Hypnos in motion. Burns tried to look away, but could not. Suddenly he screamed and began to grovel.

"Yes, I killed him! But another . . ."

He stopped, choked, made a spring for the violet light, and received the full charge of electricity. There was a terrific flash, and Burns stumbled and fell at Zudora's feet. The attorneys rushed in from behind the curtains. But Burns was dead.

Hassam Ali withdrew his head, like a cobra that had concluded not to strike. He had lost a tool who, perhaps, had known too much. But the significant fact remained that John Storm was still in his way.

And Zudora had won her first case.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]