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ZUDORA

A Great Mystic Story by Harold McGrath
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CHAPTER I. The Mystery of the Spotted Cat.

ON the side of a rugged mountain a black veiled hole yawned. Rubble lay strewn all about the ledges. 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, squinting. He eyed the lump of quartz in his hand—always a little, but never quite enough gold to make it worth while. The prospector dug the quartz savagely upon the accumulating rubble and leaped disheartenedly against the log support to the entrance of the mine. His gristle was fast dwindling, and in another four days he would have to hike some thirty-two miles to the nearest town for supplies.

twist to the corner of his lips and his hand on Donovan's shoulder. "How'd you get in here?" "Well, 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 rope." "Well, I'm her brother. What do you want with her?" "So yer Trainer's brother-in-law?" "Trainer?" said the young man, a fire lighting 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, kind o' looks like him."

grew. The cheeks 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 lank and sawky age. Hassan 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 sympathy of back's was half so fine as the clink-chink of the coins, the eagle and the double eagle as they fell upon each other, slipping from his hands.



A Huge Crystal Globe in Which Hassan Ali Saw the Past and the Future.

By and by the dreams faded and the bitter realities returned. He rose lonely and carefully picked his way down to the Irishman's shanty. The two of them shared their noon meals on pleasant days. "How's she comin'?" "Same old story," answered Trainer, a steady strong man of the Eclipse circus.

"Well, well, it's peasin' away that brings it. I got a lump 'd day that don't look so bad. I should say that she'll run fifteen 'r ten. I guess them widewaters are th' chaps that make th' real spindlers—widlers an' clerks an' chidder." In Trainer's life there had been but trifling monotonies. He had been a sailor in the south seas, a lumberjack in the north, a cowpuncher, 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 reversion to the type of pioneer who had established the Trainer family

come 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 Trainer 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 carelessly. 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 Trainer had always talked of Mimi, Mimi, Mimi, until his Celtic 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, sitting to break her heart! Still, there was a bit of cynicism 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 sudden moisture dim 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.

From her fifteenth 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 taciturn. 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 methodical and generally those of a cheat. Famous actresses and society women visited him, and not a few notable bankers and business men came to him for advice. But the general public held Hassan Ali in tolerant contempt and the police with a little suspicion.

The inner shrine of this equivocal temple was draped with black velvet, and there were secret doors about which even Zudora knew nothing. There was the inevitable dials and before this a huge crystal globe in which Hassan 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 Hassan Ali, late of the Eclipse circus, faker and card sharp, chief of a band of most clever and ingenious criminals. And Zudora was dazzled in and out of this iniquitous maze as a wild dove might have flown and unknown.

As the tinner grew stronger in Hassan 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 Hassan Ali's mind there remained no shred of compunction, only a desire to accomplish the deed without in any manner drawing 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 eighteen. 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. But how? In what subtle, cunning manner that would make it impossible for the law to trace the deed to him? And there was another obstacle rising slowly, but surely and fearfully, over the horizon—love. Youth and the necessity of love, these haunted the plans of Hassan Ali. He had flirted this way and that, even loved 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, poring over the strange trial of conviction which over lay his sense of moral obligation, Hassan saw his way. Zudora was interested in detective work and had often (Continued on page seven.)

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