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ZUDORA
A Great Mystic Story by
Harold McGrath.

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 \$200,000, 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 not himself up as a Hindu mystic and is known as Hassan 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. Hassan 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 Hassan 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 Hassan Ali himself.

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

The Secret of the Haunted Hills.

PERHAPS a month elapsed with-
out any puzzling case coming
under Hassan Ali's notice. Zu-
dora and Storm had their meet-
ings, always previously arranged by
the carrier pigeons, about which Has-
san Ali pretended to know nothing.

Besides, he was busy with numerous
clients who wanted to know about
their business investments, their own
futures and somebody else's past.

And he continued to build his pyra-
mids of phantom gold.

The one mistake he had made was to
acquaint Zudora with the knowledge
of her immense fortune.

The trustees had always addressed
their letters to him, and it would have
been an easy matter to have kept her
in ignorance. But, evil as he was
himself, he had a profound respect for
Zudora's word. She had given it, and
there was three years' grace.

If in that period of time he could
not rid himself of that meddling at-
torney, he would tear down the black
velvet curtains with his own hands
and make a bonfire of them.

Storm had urged Zudora a dozen
times to marry him secretly, but she
steadfastly refused to accede to his
wishes.

Of what use to marry if they could
not have a home of their own?
Of what use to burden themselves
with a secret which would interfere
with their pursuits and hang threaten-
ingly over their heads?

More than that, she reasoned, her
friends would always look askance at
her if, after some months, it became
known that she was married and was
not living openly with her husband.

No; she had given her word, and she
would not break it. So John surren-



Zudora.

dered gracefully. But he was always
feeling that mysterious cloud which
hung hovering over them both.

Many a night while alone he tried to
figure out the basic cause for Hassan
Ali's attitude. Some day, when work
eased up a bit, he determined to go
back over Hassan Ali's past with all
the searching inquiry of a first class
lawyer.

There was something more than
mere physical antagonism. He never
confessed this belief to Zudora, how-
ever.

It did not look quite fair to her to
put doubts into her heart when he had
nothing back of these doubts but in-
stinct.

But there was no getting around the
plain fact that he feared Hassan Ali—
feared him for Zudora's sake.

One day Storm received a letter from
his mother, and the contents first
amused, then alarmed him. His par-
ents were well to do country folk in
the south. Their forebears had been
southerners of wealth and position up
to wartime.

Place by place the fine double inher-
itance had vanished, and at the time of
John's birth they had sunk from af-
fluence to the ordinary comforts of life.
There had been enough money to send
the lad to college, to fit him for his
own battle in life.

He was a good son, writing home
once a month and invariably today vis-
iting whenever there was opportunity.

Often he had sent checks home, but
invariably these had been returned.
They did not need the money; they had
enough for their simple wants, and
when they died all they had would be
his.

His mother had written that an
alarming mystery had confronted
them, one that promised to deplete
the negro servants on the various
farms and estates. And just now, when
all the crops were ripe, it meant ruin
for a great many whose sole income
was derived from their crops.

The negroes were not dying; they
were fleeing. This mystery was no
idle fancy, no idle rumor. It was a
living fact, visible to the eye. She
and her husband had seen the thing
themselves, and they were normal
minded people.

Something must be done soon or
there would not be a servant left in
the county.

The hill back of the Storm place
was haunted. Night after night, against
the side of the hill, there appeared the
heroic skeleton of a human hand with
a black spot in the center of the palm,
as if it had been made by an enor-
mous bullet.

No one could get close to it. In-
variably it vanished at the approach
of any living being. This ghastly



Hassan Ali and Jimmy Bolton.

thing waxed and waned, something
after the manner of the coal of a
man's pipe.

Of course it was plain trickery, but
one could not impress the crafty
negro mind with this fact, and, more
than this, there were many white peo-
ple who were quite assured that this
skeleton hand presaged the coming of
the end of the world.

Something must be done at once.
Would her dear son come immediately
and see if he could put this mystery
where it belonged? He wired back
that he would.

Of course there was no doubt to
his mind that some one was playing a
practical joke of a grewsome sort, but
he also realized that it might turn into
a serious affair if it was permitted to
continue.

He laughed at one moment and
swore at the next. Why the perpetu-
ators of the joke had selected the hill
back of the Storm place set him think-
ing deeply.

He decided to go home and lay the
ghost, as the saying goes. He packed
up, sent a letter to Zudora and left
town.

When Zudora received the letter she
was greatly perturbed. It seemed to
her that what appeared as a bit of
course folly might have as its base
something serious regarding the wel-
fare of her love and his people. Rather
diffidently she sought Hassan Ali's ad-
vice.

Her uncle shrugged. "Some country
humph is playing a joke on the more
simple minded. Go and solve it if you
wish, only you'll have your trouble for
your pains."

"But how do you account for the
hand?"

"Trickery, pure and simple; phos-
phorescence maybe. The negro mind—
at least the southern negro—is full of
kinks, like his hair. He will take it
as a sign that the world is coming to
an end."

"Some negroes have already desert-
ed. It looks to me something more
than an idle jest."

Hassan Ali gave her a quick, shrewd
glance. He wondered what was going
on in the girl's mind. Had she any
suspicions? It was inherent for her to
speak the truth.

"Have you intimated in Storm of the
gold?" he asked.

"No," rather solemnly. "I have
given my word. You ought to know
that I never break it."

"But often regret giving it?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, my advice is, stay home.
There is no reason why you should
take any risks on account of Storm's
people."

"You said it was probably a tramp-
ster's joke."

"Yes, but the negroes cannot be
tricked in a case where their imagina-
tion may get the better of their com-
mon sense. Better wait until you hear
from this fool of a lover of yours."

"I am better able to judge John
Storm than you," coldly. "He is not a
fool."

"Hoity-toity! Hasn't it ever occurred

to you that Storm is young, simple and
until the most young man?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Has he told you everything about
his life before he met you?"

"Will you kindly explain?"

"Let him explain," said Hassan Ali
and, having sunk this barb of doubt,
turned on his heel and retired to his
den, rather well-satisfied with himself.

But Zudora's love was like a shield.
The barb bounded off harmlessly. John
Storm was a clean man in thought and
in life. She had not passed through
this peculiar schooling of hers without
being able to read between the lines.
She was absolutely certain that love
could not blind her to any defects in
John. All Hassan Ali accomplished by
his intemperate was to enlarge that
unfolding suspicion which was ever
in her heart.

A good many of us are shortsighted
mentally. It is easier to judge things
in the distance than close at hand.
While the general world knew that
Hassan Ali was a miser, Zudora was
quite ignorant of the fact. Had she
definitely known of his inordinate love
of gold, her subsequent miseries might
have been avoided to some extent.

Storm went south immediately. The
home was simple and comfortable.
There were two or three bits of an-
tique furniture which had been saved
from the wreck. It was night when he
arrived. The country railway station
had, with its usual nondescript crowd
of idlers, witnessed his arrival, and
the news traveled quickly. He regret-
ted that he had not come secretly and
gone about his investigations unob-
served. But the damage was done and
proved conclusively that he was not
cut out for a detective.

He was greeted fondly by his par-
ents, and they repeated with elabora-
tions what had been recounted to him
in the letter. It was downright serious,
no laughing matter. The help were de-
claring that the mystic hand was the
warning of the world's end. Not a few
of the poorer class of white folk were
accepting the hoax as a serious affair.
Some of the negroes were even going
so far as to kneel down to the hand
(from a safe distance) and inton-
prayers.

"Humph!" muttered Storm. "I want
a good look at this thing. And some-
one is going to get a rattling good
licking before I go back to town. Why
the dickens should they pick out our
hill for their tomfoiery?"

"Father says it's because some one
has a grudge against the family," said
his mother.

"Fiddle!"

"An imaginary grievance," she added.
"Who could possibly have a grudge
against you two, who have done every-
thing to make life decently worth
while to the help?"

"You never can tell," said old Mr.
Storm, digging into his pocket for his
pipe.

"What time does it generally ap-
pear?"

"Oh, any time between sundown and
midnight."

"All right. I'll take a shotgun and
go hunting for Mr. Ghost this very
night," Storm declared wrathfully.

But he wasted his time. Also the
night following nothing came of his
vigil. The third night he was called
to the door in time to see the hand
flicker for a moment and then vanish.
He rushed toward the hill, but found
nothing. He began to grow very
angry. He admitted, the little time he
saw it that it was grewsome enough.
It was eight or ten feet in height, with
a shadow in the palm like an embed-
ded bullet. Subconsciously he seemed
to recognize something vaguely fam-
ilar about the shape of the hand.

He did not go into the village, but
prowled around in the vicinity where
the hand appeared most frequently.
There was no evidence of phosphor-
escence, no footprints except those
made by the negroes some two or
three hundred yards below the hill.
John was puzzled and irritated at the
same time. This joke was being per-
petrated by some one who had brains.
Meanwhile the crops lay ungathered
and were beginning to rot in the fields.
Something must be done in a hurry,
else he would be compelled to send to
the city for emigrants, who would
doubtless take to their heels after the
same manner as the negroes. So he
telegraphed for Zudora.

And Zudora came.

The Storm family had heard about
her, you may be assured. But until

she appeared in the flesh they had en-
tertained some doubts about this niece
of a man whose business they held in
supreme contempt. They fell in love
with her at once, rather shamefacedly
when up to that moment they had
been quite positive that she had laid a
siren's trap for their boy.



The Skeleton Hand Appeared on the Side of the Hill.

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supreme contempt. They fell in love
with her at once, rather shamefacedly
when up to that moment they had
been quite positive that she had laid a
siren's trap for their boy.

(Continued on page seven.)

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