

ZUDORA In the Twenty Million Dollar Mystery

HAROLD MAC GRATH

The remarkable adventures of the charming Zudora will be portrayed by Harold MacGrath in the succeeding chapters. This photo serial is being shown in the leading motion picture theaters by the Thanhouser Film corporation. Among those participating are Maryonette Swan, Mary Elizabeth Forbes, James Cross, in the new role of reporter here; Sidney Steers, and Frank Farrington.

SYNOPSIS

Zudora, heiress to \$20,000,000, is placed in the guardianship of her uncle, Hassam Ali, a myrtle. Hassam Ali is determined to secure the girl's fortune for himself, and when she becomes of age he makes every effort to bring about her death. Zudora is in love with a young lawyer, John Storm, and she seeks permission of her miserly uncle to marry him. Hassam Ali promises to grant her wish provided she shall solve twenty of the riddles which he has written on the cover of her uncle's diary, and she is released of her pledge.

At the death of her uncle, Zudora has another suitor for her hand—Jim Baird, a man who has been playing a double to Hassam Ali, but who, through sincere love of the girl, gives up the false life and goes back to his work as a newspaper reporter.

No longer obliged to solve Hassam Ali's cases Zudora now confronts the greatest mystery of all, which is the mystery of her own life and the ambition to secure the great fortune of \$20,000,000 left her. On looking through her uncle's papers she also finds that her father left her an interest in a diamond mine, and Storm and Baird both lend assistance in trying to regain her possession of this estate, which is being appropriated by rogues.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE AT THE BRIDGE

ONE bright, keen winter day Zudora and Mrs. Ramsey sat in the former's room discussing the malignancy of the star that hovered over Zudora's destiny. If only she might find one bit of complete evidence against her enemies, or some document to fully uphold her claims! She could do nothing at court with these fragments, these half sheets. Possession was nine points in law; and it did not require John Storm's legal advice to convince her of this fact.

If Hassam Ali had not been a thorough miser all valuable papers would have been deposited in the deposit box at the bank. Storm and more she became convinced that her uncle had had sinister designs upon her life, that he had been maneuvering to get her out of the way so that he might control the entire fortune. All she wanted was to be mind free. Well, sooner or later something would turn up, some workable plan; three such men as Storm, Baird, and Hunt would find a chink in the enemy's armor.

"I'm going to look through that old trunk again," Zudora declared, rising. "Come and help me."

So the two of them dragged out the trunk and went through everything religiously, so thoroughly that a moth could not have escaped. Protruding from a torn piece in the lining Zudora came upon a sheet of paper. She studied the pothooks from all angles, but could make nothing of it. However, she told it aside for Storm's appraisal.

What puzzled her as much as anything was the fact that the spurious claimants had

"There is nothing but this sheet with the pothooks," she declared finally. "I can't make anything out of it."

"You poor child! Why don't you marry your sweetheart and have done with all this? He has plenty for both."

"That isn't it, Mrs. Ramsey. I come from a fighting stock, and I will never give up this fight until I am beaten." She glanced at the clock. "It is time John was here. Why not come along with us? The skating will be fine."

"I haven't had skates on in an age," protested Mrs. Ramsey.

"That won't matter; all the more fun for you," insisted Zudora.

"You're a strange girl."

"In what way?"

"Why, you can throw off your burdens so quickly, without apparent effort."

"I do not throw them off; I merely refuse to let them dampen what pleasure I can get out of life." Zudora ran to a window.

"There he is now! He's just as patient and kindly as he can be. And there's a box under his arm. I'll wager it's his hothouse violets. He never forgets the fact that I love flowers."

She did not notice the two men loitering on the opposite side of the street, Radcliffe and Gyp the gunman.

Storm came in, his eyes clear and his cheeks full of color. He was bubbling with cheer.

"All aboard! The ice will be just splendid. Here's a bunch of violets for you, sweetheart."

"Thank you, John," Zudora pinned the flowers against her waist. "You are very thoughtful after all the trouble I have caused you."

"Please! What man wouldn't be thoughtful if he had you always in mind? What's this? Been rummaging around in the old trunk again? Found anything?"

"Nothing but this sheet of paper."

John took it. "Why, it looks like a map or plan of a mine!"

"A map?" chorused Zudora and Mrs. Ramsey.

"And I didn't know what it could be!" exclaimed Zudora.

"I'll wager it's some data regarding the boundaries of the diamond mine in Africa. Anyhow I'd hang on to it. It may be worthless, and again it may have value. Put it back in the trunk. My rule is, never throw away any scrap of paper you do not thoroughly understand. Whenever I sign a contract I go to a brother lawyer to see if he gets the same points I do. Put it back into the trunk and come along. It's glorious out of doors today."

When Radcliffe and Gyp the gunman saw the three depart for the skating pond the former instructed the gunman to remain on the watch and to whistle in case of danger. He himself was determined to enter the house and have a thorough look into Zudora's room. He found an unlocked window in the rear, and through this he entered the house. Everybody was out, including the servant. He could not have found a better opportunity.

He knew where Zudora's room was, having once made a midnight visit to it. They had tricked him out of a fine lot of gems, and he had not yet recovered from the chagrin of this fact. To this day he had not the least idea where they had hidden the stones. He was certain that the gems were not in the

from the house of Hassam Ali. He knelt beside it and threw back the lid. He eyed curiously the sangles and mottle of the old circus days. But the folded sheet of paper interested him far more. And when he spread it out and discovered that it was practically a complete survey of the mine in Africa he was delighted. He already knew the defines of the African property; so far as he was concerned it was of no intrinsic value; but it would eventually be valuable to Zudora. So he stuffed it into his pocket and went on with his search. Then he came upon the false bottom to the trunk; and here he found the documents which completed the case! He laughed. With these in his possession Zudora would lose her case in any court in America. What a find! Neither the girl nor her advisers had ever thought of thoroughly investigating the latter old leather trunk!

He was in high feather when he stole out of the Ramsey house. He had made a great find. He was legally master of millions. It would be a simple case of manufacturing a will of prior date to Zudora's, upon old legal cap, with the notary's seal, some old chap who had died in Montana. It would be very easy now that he had all the documents in the case. Madam Du Val would be pleased, so pleased that she might lend a more willing ear to his pleas. They had had this trunk all these weeks and had not thought to sound it for a false bottom! That was supreme luck. He felt more and more assured of his star as he rejoined Gyp. Millions, luxury, all his cravings to be gratified!

And Zudora, flying across the smooth, glistering surface of the pond, began to have hopes that her star had reached its nadir and was once more ascending toward the zenith. Well, perhaps it was. The sunshine, the exhilaration of the sport, the nearness of one beloved, these would have set cheer into many a heart darker than Zudora's.



THEN HE CAME UPON THE FALSE BOTTOM TO THE TRUNK, AND HERE HE FOUND THE DOCUMENTS WHICH COMPLETED THE CASE



HE SLIPPED BEHIND THE PORTIER, JUST IN TIME TO SEE CAPT. RADCLIFFE COME IN



HERE'S A BUNCH OF VIOLETS FOR YOU, SWEETHEART

the law on their side. Where had they secured their backing? How had they learned that there existed documents, that there were gold and diamond mines? Hassam Ali certainly had not confided these facts to them.

house at present. Doubtless they had been disposed of secretly.

The first thing that welcomed his gaze was the battered old trunk. The scorched leather at once convinced him that this had come

When the three of them returned to Mrs. Ramsey's the latter served tea, and for an hour it was a happy family. Then Storm remembered the survey map.

"You'd better let me have that and lock it

up in my safe," he suggested. "You never can tell what will happen these days."

But Zudora searched the leather trunk from top to bottom in vain.

"That's funny! You saw me put it on the top tray?"

"I did," said Storm gravely. He went about the room examining the windows. He left the two women and went downstairs. On the linoleum in the kitchen he saw muddy tracks. That was enough. "Some one has been here during our absence," he declared on returning to Zudora's room. "Whoever it was has got that paper. Evidently I was watched, and when we went to the pond the water came into the kitchen window. Well, perhaps I'm to blame. I should have put it into my pocket."

Meantime in Detective Hunt's office things were being arranged for the ascendancy of Zudora's star, which was in truth very low.

"Baird, I'm going to enter the Du Val villa by the front door this trip."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the late Hassam Ali's double.

"I mean that I'm going to enter in a capacity which will excite madam's vanity. There's no woman alive that does not like the idea of having her likeness perpetuated in all if done by a celebrated artist."

"That's true enough," said Baird. "Go on, I'm interested."

"Well, I'm going to be that celebrated artist."

"Dot, Lord, man, can you paint?"

"Well enough to serve my purpose."

"You're a man of many surprises."

"That's high praise; you used to be that yourself."

"Give me all the points of the game."

"You've heard of Jacques La Fontaine?"

"Yes. Just at present he's in the trenches in Alsace."

"So I learned. But Madam Du Val will not dig deep so long as I can keep her vanity stirred. Now, then, watch your Uncle Dudley; in ten minutes I'll be the exact counterpart of the painter as he was during his last visit, six months ago. He came with splen-

did introductions, one of which I have. And I've based a neat little forgery on it. Here's La Fontaine's photograph. Keep your eye on me and take a lesson on how to get into the skin of another man. I want to get into that villa the worst kind of way. It keeps going through my head that there is some connection between it and that old junk but or garage we've skylarked in once or twice."

"I recollect the place," observed Baird dryly. "They nearly had me there one day."

Hunt went to work rapidly and skillfully, and within the stipulated time presented an appearance that was near enough to that of the real artist to fool the ordinary eye.

"Great work!" cried Baird. "I tell you what: You enter the villa and get established, and I on my part will see where that garage trap door leads to."

At 4 that afternoon Hunt, armed with his forged introduction, presented himself at the front door of the Du Val villa. He was ushered in by the pompous footman. The pseudo-artist was requested to be seated. Then the footman took the letter upstairs to his mistress, who was more delighted by the letter than the thought of being painted. She had met the distinguished French nobleman but twice, and it flattered her greatly to believe that she had been remembered. And, more than this, the famous artist had once noted her singular beauty and never would be happy until he had put it upon canvas.

Thus Hunt's initial reception was most cordial. Madam Du Val would be delighted to give him as many sittings as he desired.

Baird met Hunt a short distance from the villa and the two of them walked toward town.

"What luck?" asked the reporter.

"It was the easiest bit of work I ever did. When you tickle a woman's vanity you blind her. I'm going to put up at one of the hotels. She might have it in her mind to call me up to change the hour of appointment. Tomorrow I'll begin to outline her features. You can take it from me, though, that she'll never hang this portrait anywhere for her friends to see. What I want in a few minutes alone inside that villa, when they think I'm outside of it. That's the ticket, and it may take a week or two to make the play."

Later, when they reached another part of the town, Baird caught Hunt by the arm.

"See that old codger ahead of us?"

Hunt nodded.

"Well, that's the diamond cutter I told you about. Suppose we run along after him and see where he goes?"

The old man led them to his den without so much as a single glance over his shoulder. Hunt agreed to go inside while Baird stood on guard outside. Half an hour later Hunt rejoined the reporter.

"I have seen Capt. Radcliffe go in there," said Baird, "and I've just been thinking hard."

"No!" cried the detective jestingly.

"That bearded man in Montana and the captain shape up a good deal alike."

"So much alike that I'm certain they are one and the same. I've been thinking, too. But when a fisherman casts his net he first makes sure that there are no holes in it. That old lapidary's face is known to me. Half the smuggled gems go to him; but we can't arrest the old boy. It's only logical that if some one brings him a stone to cut he cuts it without asking questions. But I'm hanged if I don't stop some of the men who go there. I can't bother with him now. I want Madam Du Val's portrait started."

Four days later at half after 4—at the same moment Zudora and Storm set out upon

a short automobile trip—you could have seen the detective in his velvet jacket, leaning away earnestly and with so unworldly success. He could paint and paint well; but he was a man who required artistic competencies, to untangle, mobility; and it had to sit in a chair for an hour or two, with the odor of paint making him headache.

Madam Du Val sat so that from some of her eye she could watch the back by and by Hunt laid aside his palette.

"That will be all for today, I am quite sure you are tired."

"Join me with a cup of chocolate," she said amiably.

While they were sipping the chocolate the fountain jet reversed. Hunt pretended not to notice this peculiarity, but he could see that madam began to stir restively. Suddenly she set down her cup, complaining of a violent headache. Hunt gathered up his materials and politely excused himself. The footman, however, in letting him out failed to note that the ferrule of Hunt's one leg caught between the door and the jamb. Obviously the detective recoiled and tumbled into the conservatory. He waited for a moment or two, then stole out into the snow. A spot on one of the columns attracted his attention. Upon close inspection he found it to be a sliding panel. He was figuring upon a method to open it when he heard foot steps. He slipped behind the portier.

It was Madam Du Val, coming down to greet Capt. Radcliffe, who had just come in. She at once showed him the portrait. He shrugged. He was not at all interested in this style of art.

"There goes the fountain," he remarked.

"Merciful heaven, I had forgotten about those fools! They struck the fountain while La Fontaine was here; but luckily he did not notice it. Let them in."

Hunt was very much surprised to see these old antagonists enter the room from one of the columns. He was still more surprised when he saw madam open the secret door in the onyx table. His eyes snapped. The table would be worth while. Just as soon as these precious rogues left the salon he determined to investigate. He was an ingenious man, but his ingenuity failed utterly to learn the secret of the onyx table. He was certain, however, that it held all he wanted to know. He left the villa unobserved.

In the meantime Baird had discovered the tunnel from the garage led directly to the Du Val villa; but he had chosen a bad day for the investigation. The three crooks were turning from their visit, caught sight of him and gave chase. He reached the back door in the garage first, but before he could reach the door they were upon him. He succeeded in laying out two of them, but the second man proved to be a tough customer. The was not the first time Baird had felt the bone-like grip of the man.

They battled through the doorway, along the sidewalk, until they reached the street. That Baird lived to tell the tale was due solely to the unexpected arrival of Storm and Storm. They recognized Baird as his antagonist toppled over the parapet and the icy stream below, where the light was raged. At length the reporter succeeded in getting free of the clutch of his antagonist who paid the penalty for his loyalty in a life case.

Storm got a rope from his tool box, and he tied to the extra tire, flinging it over the railing. Baird as one would throw a life preserver at sea. Baird was all in. He had the strength enough to grasp the tire, and Storm hauled away with a will.

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