

THE HUMAN SPHINX

By Ellis Parker Cutler

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F.E. WATSON

Simon Judd, amateur detective, and William Dart, an undertaker, are visiting John Drane, eccentric man of wealth, at the Drane place. Suddenly the household is shocked to find that John Drane has been murdered. The dead man is first seen by Josie, the maid, then by Amy Drane and Simon Judd. The latter faints.

Police officers call and investigations begin. Dr. Blessington is called, and after seeing the murdered John Drane makes the astounding revelation to Amy Drane that her "uncle" is not a man but a woman.

Dr. Blessington discounts the theory of suicide, saying that Drane was definitely murdered. Dr. Blessington comments on the fact that all the servants in the household of Drane are sick, and that Drane has never discharged a servant for ill health. Dick Brennan, the detective, arrives to investigate the case.

Brennan questions the persons in the house, asking Amy if anyone had any reason to kill her "uncle."

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY:

"No; not a reason; not the slightest reason!" Amy declared with absolute positiveness. "I can't even imagine why anyone would want to kill my-uncle."

"And as far as you know, there was no one in the house last night but your uncle, Mr. Judd here, Mr. Dart and the servants?" Brennan asked her. "I know," he added "that you can't say whether others may not have come in unknown to you."

Amy's eyes turned to Bob Carter. "Yes, I was in the house last night," Carter said.

"About when, Carter?" Brennan asked.

"Late," Carter said. "After eleven and before twelve. Mr. Drane said he wanted to see me; he sent Norbert to tell me so yesterday afternoon—just before we went for the drive, you remember, Amy? There was no hurry, Norbert said; either last night or today would do. I rather knew what he had on his mind. I had asked him if I could marry Amy, and he had put off answering me. So last night I happened to pass here and I saw the lights in the library and I came in."

"Ring or knock or anything?"

"I went to the library door at that side of the house and knocked on the door, and Mr. Drane let me in," Bob said. "Mr. Dart was with him; no one else. I said good evening to Mr. Dart and Mr. Drane said we could go across the hall to the dining room for a few minutes, and we did. There's one thing I ought to tell you, I guess; just as we were going out Mr. Dart said, 'Now, remember what I told you, John; I don't approve.' It was something like that; he may have said 'I'm against it' or 'I won't have it.' I was rather excited, you see; what Mr. Drane was going to say meant such a lot to me."

"Naturally," agreed Brennan. "Well?"

"That's about all," Carter said. "We went into the dining room and Mr. Drane talked to me awhile. It was mostly about my prospects and what I was planning to do with my life and whether I would be willing to come to this house to live after we were married—Amy and I. He said we had best travel for a year, or stay elsewhere a year. After that he wanted us, here. I told him that was what Amy wanted—it was the only reason she hesitated about marrying; she did not want to leave him. So he said it would be alright."

"I'm so glad, Bob!" Amy cried. "I'm so glad to think he was willing!"

"And then what?" Brennan asked, seeing that Carter was hesitating.

"Well, it was rather queer," Carter said, blushing. "I thought it was rather queer then, but it doesn't seem so queer now—not when we know what we know now. He asked if he

CAST
of Principal Characters in this Amazing Mystery Story

John Drane The Human Sphinx
Amy The Girl
Robert Carter Her Sweetheart
William Dart The Undertaker
Simon Judd Friend of Drane
Dr. Blessington The Family Doctor
Dick Brennan A Detective
Servants in the Drane Household

could kiss me."

"He did?" Brennan exclaimed.

"Not quite so bravely as all that,"

Carter said. "He laughed and laughed and said that if we were French he supposed we would kiss each other on both cheeks. I said I had been kissed, when I was given my cross. 'Then you won't mind if I do kiss you,' he said, and he kissed me. I felt—well, I felt sorry for him, that's how I felt. I thought 'Poor old fellow!' I knew nobody around here cared much for him, and he was getting pretty old. That sort of feeling. And now, when I know he was a woman!"

"It's bound to come out now and again," said Brennan tersely. "A woman can stand only so much without affection. The very worst I've ever known came to it now and again. And then what did you do?"

"We talked a few minutes about when the wedding might be, and I said I would have to leave that to Amy. Then he said—"

Carter hesitated a moment but Brennan said nothing.

"He spoke about money," Carter went on. "He said he had made his will in Amy's favor and that he was leaving her everything he had. Then he said she was a good girl; he said very nice things about her and said he meant to give her outright a hundred thousand dollars the day she was married, if I did not object. I have nothing of my own, you know. He said that he thought, living in his house and having to be mistress of it, Amy should not have to be compelled to ask him for money. He meant for the extra expenses, the things I could not pay for. I didn't see anything

wrong in that. I didn't see that it had anything to do with my loving Amy. Amy knows it's not anybody's money I care for. So when we shook hands and I came away."

"Through the library again?" Brennan asked.

"No. Mr. Drane let me out by this door."

"So you didn't see Mr. Dart again?"

"No. I went down the driveway there and walked home."

"You haven't any idea what it was Mr. Dart wanted Mr. Drane not to do?"

"Not really," Carter said. "It may be they had been talking over Amy and me and Mr. Dart didn't care for me enough to have me marry Amy. Mr. Drane and Dart were old friends—what they call 'cronies' almost. Or it may have been giving Amy so much money in a lump that Dart objected to. I don't know."

"But your impression was that Mr. Dart referred to the talk you were about to have with Mr. Drane?" Brennan asked.

"That's what I thought," Carter admitted. "I hadn't any doubt of it. I thought to myself 'What business is it of his, anyway?' I don't like him much, anyway."

"And now, Miss Drane," Brennan asked without a pause, "have you ever seen anything that made you think, even in the slightest degree, that your uncle was a woman?"

"No," Amy said without hesitation, and immediately changed her answer to yes! "Never while he was alive," she said. "I never entered my head, not in the very slightest. But now I can see things. He was so kind to me."

"Might not an uncle be kind?" Brennan asked.

"Yes, but not in that way. Affectionate is what I should say, probably. I didn't know, you see—I didn't think—how a man would be, but I can see now, Mr. Brennan, that he was more like a mother in the way he—in the way he kissed me and smoothed my hair. More like a woman, more like a

mother!"

"Have you any reason for thinking he was your mother?" Brennan asked and Amy stared at him with wide eyes.

"Uncle John my mother?" she gasped and put her fingers to her lips as if in fear. "Oh, he couldn't be my mother—he—"

"You knew your mother?" Brennan asked. "You see, Miss Drane, I don't know any of the facts; I have to ask for them. Did you know your mother?"

Bob Carter frowned with annoyance that Amy should be annoyed. He looked at her and turned to Brennan.

"I can answer that," he said "Amy told me all that."

"Let her tell me," said Brennan but his tone was kindly.

"I never knew my mother," Amy

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