

THE HUMAN SPHINK

By **Ellis Parker Fuller**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. E. WATSON

"Yes, the first," Abner Dart said so weakly that they could hardly hear him. "The first was a housekeeper she had, named Caroline Barstell. She was a sickly old thing and believed in ghosts—she thought she was a medium and had second sight but she was keen. She was keen the way fortune tellers are when they study a person and then tell them what their past has been and what their characters are. She told Ella right out to her face she was a woman. That night Mrs. Barstell had a fit and died."

"Ella had poisoned her?"

"Yes, and that was the first. That was what started Ella getting the sick ones from the hospital—Dr. Blessington made no trouble over the Barstell woman's death; he said she had been in danger of death at all times."

Abner Dart was silent a moment. "There were nine others," he said hoarsely. "Nine others. When Ella suspected that one of them believed she was a woman that one died."

"And who is Amy, Abner?"

Before Abner Dart could answer Simon Judd's question the silence was broken by cries and loud noises within the house and Brennan leaped for the door and ran inside. For a brief period the noise continued, then it was silenced and Brennan came out again. "That Maggie cook was cutting loose," he said. "She has been drinking more but I took the stuff from her and she promised to be a good girl. Did you say who Amy was, Dart?"

"She's a Drane," Abner Dart replied. "Along during these last years Ella complained a good deal because she had never had a child. It bothered her mind. She talked to me about it. She worried because we were old and there would be no one to leave the money to, and I told her to adopt a child. She used to go away when she was sick; she went to Hot Springs when she had appendicitis; she couldn't let the doctors here handle her illness, of course, so she went away. She went to California on one of the trips when she thought she was going to be sick, and she heard of a Drane there and tried to find him—his name was Silas, but he had died and his wife had died and they had left this baby. So Ella adopted it. That's Amy. That is all we ever knew about Amy. She was a great comfort to Ella, these years, especially these last months."

"Well, black my cats, I'm glad to know there was some good in the woman, anyway!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "Did she make that will she was talking about, leaving the money to Amy?"

"Yes, and she was going to give Amy a fine sum when she married. We liked Bob Carter. It was like ending with something clean after a lot of vileness to know we would leave these two when we went," Abner Dart said. "It did not pay, Sime. She made a mistake, Ella did. She wasn't happy and I wasn't happy. John Drane's money did her no good and it did me no good. I'd have enjoyed life more just being a second-rate undertaker out there in Riverbank, burying some old friend now and then, and going along nice and easy."

Amy was weeping now, crying gently, and Bob Carter, sitting on the arm of her chair was trying to comfort her. Norbert, coughing, came to the door. He seemed to think Brennan was in charge of the house, for he spoke to him.

"If you please, Mist. Brennan," he said, "George Firmandick has just gone an' died all of a sudden an' Maggie is startin' to carry on mighty bad. 'Where is she?' Brennan asked.

"She's up in his room ovah the garage," Norbert said, "an' she won't let nobody come up. She's got hold of a knife and I reckon she's gone plum crazy."

"I'll be out there in a minute," Brennan said. "Have the two officers go out with you, will you? Hurry now! I just want to ask Mr. Dart a couple of questions."

Norbert hurried away, coughing as he went, and Abner Dart made a gesture of despair with his hand and his face became sadder than ever.

"Last night," Brennan, "when Carter here went through the library, Dart, you said to Ella—to John Drane, if you please—something like 'Don't do it! I warn you not to!' or 'I'm against it; remember what I say!' Something of that sort. What did you mean by that? Were you warning your wife not to let Amy marry Carter?"

"No," Abner Dart said hollowly. "Oh, not that; never that! We both wanted that."

"Then it wasn't over that you and Ella Drane quarreled last night?"

"You know we quarreled, then?" Abner Dart asked dully.

"We know it," Brennan said. "Why did you not stay the night as had been arranged?"

For a full minute Abner Dart did not answer and when he did it was in the voice of one talking in his sleep.

"I'm old! I'm old! And I'm tired! A man can stand so much and then he can stand no more. I had thought so—was through with her killing and that we might have a few years of peace and gentleness before we died. But she told me there—in there, last night—that another had to die; another had come to believe she was a woman, George the chauffeur, had. George Firmandick had. She told me last night that George must die before morning, and that was what I was begging her not to do. That was why we quarreled. That was why I went away last night. I told her I was through with her—through for ever."

"Dart," Brennan demanded sharply, "do you know who killed Ella Dart last night?"

"No! I do not know!" the little man said, shaking his head. "If I knew I would tell you. I—"

One of the police officers interrupted this time, coming around the veranda, walking firmly on his broad soles.

"Brennan!" he said motioning to the detective with a finger.

"What is it, Joe?" Brennan asked.

"The cook lady, Maggie Maney her name is, had a spell and passed out up yonder in the chauffeur's room just now," the officer said. "I don't know was she right in her mind or not but

she was shoutin' that the dead woman had killed the chauffeur. She was shoutin' that the dead woman was murderin' all that guessed she was a female, sir, and that last night she saw the dead woman—who was not yet dead, you understand, Brennan—givin' George some drops, at which time the cook was in the chauffeur's closet, I'm sorry to say, sir."

"And—" said Brennan questioningly as he closed his note book and dropped it into his pocket.

"And the last words the cook shouted before she passed out," the officer said, "was to the effect that she had murdered this late John Drane, now known to be a female, usin' a knife as the implement, the object of the crime bein' revenge, and the crime bein' actuated by love and affection for the said George Firmandick, now deceased."

"Write all that down before you get any of it Joe," Brennan said. "You'll have to give that to the Grand Jury, possibly."

He turned to Simon Judd, "I think that's our case," he said "It's not much for us but it will be a big story for the newspapers. By the time it reaches Riverbank you ought to be quite a hero detective, Judd."

"If I ain't," Simon Judd said placidly, "it won't be my fault."

THE END

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT

Notice is hereby given that Maggie Stewart as administratrix of the estate of Robert K. Stewart, deceased, has filed her final account in said estate and the County Court of Lane County, Oregon has fixed Friday the 28th day of December, 1928 at the hour of 10:00 o'clock in the forenoon of said day at the County Court house in Eugene, Lane County, Oregon, as the time and place for the hearing of said final account.

All persons having objections to said final account are notified to present the same in writing on or before said time.

Dated this 22nd day of November, 1928.

MAGGIE STEWART, Administratrix of the Estate of Robert K. Stewart, deceased.

Harris, Smith & Bryson, Attorneys for Administratrix.

N. 22-29; D. 6-13-29.

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COAST NOW CLEAR FOR CASCADE HIGHWAY

(Molalla Pioneer)

The state highway commission has not been active in highway construction this year. Threatened legislation which would materially effect the amounts received by the commission prevented them taking any new work and caused them to soft pedal on the old jobs.

While the season for effective work is passed they have begun to be active in all parts of the state.

The very decisive vote against the Dunne bills should convince the commission that the state expects them to keep to the work of road construction. There is no sentiment in favor of extravagance and an expressed desire for economical expenditures of the immense sums entrusted to the commission.

The Cascade highway should be in shape now to receive favorable attention from the commission. While it is true that projects which have been in the program for sometime are yet unfinished, it is also true that from time to time, since the original bond was voted and the original program submitted to the people, there has been additions to that program.

There never has been a project submitted to the commission where the small amount required to make the Cascade highway a reality, would do so much to develop the state or accommodate so much traffic which is already created.

This whole, vast, rich region has about reached its possible limit with out having a highway. Just as industry and population formerly followed the railroads so it now follows the highways. This region has been paying its share of the highway constructions these years that have built in Oregon a system of highways which are a source of pride to the state and nation.

It is only reasonable that at this time they be assured that in the near future they will be given a highway and permit the tremendous development of this the richest territory in the state of Oregon.

The Cascade highway association is asking that the highway commission survey and locate the road that the counties along the route will be able to work to a plan and avoid waste. Much of this proposed road is now paved and other parts are graded.

Clackamas county has already spent huge sums in cutting the Everhart hill and the Spangler cut off on this route. A bridge has just been completed across the Molalla river at Liberal which is on the route. Fourteen miles of the road has a half

cement pavement. The whole road is graded except where slight changes might be made to improve grades or curves.

If the commission cannot spend any money on this road for five years except making the survey and definite location, most of the road would be in condition before that time, to be used as a highway.

We can think of no reasonable excuse which can be advanced by the commission for denying this very small request of the association.

Now that the Dunne bills danger is out of the way the Cascade Highway association along the route will make an aggressive campaign for membership and put on a publicity campaign which will let the rest of the state know the righteousness of the cause and the boundless wealth which is being tied up for the lack of a proper highway.

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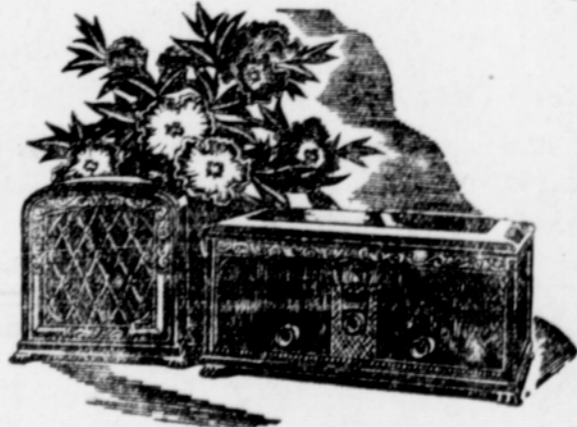
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