

THE HUMAN SPHINX

By Ellis Parker Butler

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F.E. WATSON

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

The day was splendid, as brilliant as a day on Long Island can be, and that is brilliant indeed. The great square house with its mansard roof and many wings and additions and the great pillars of the veranda that gave it a certain nobility was glistening white, for it had just been painted. The painters, as a matter of fact, were still at work on the rear of the house. They were working over time this Saturday afternoon, hurrying to finish the job. John Drane had complained of the paint odor, saying it gave him a headache.

The Drane place, although it had been given no particular name, was as good as any in Westcote. Real estate dealers roughly estimated it to be worth a hundred thousand dollars and pointed to it as an example of how prices in Westcote had improved; Drane had paid fifteen thousand for it in 1892 and had spent some twenty thousand in improving the place, having the pillared veranda built on and so on, so that the whole cost to him had been only thirty-five thousand. This was mentioned as a sample of the good fortune John Drane had in all his investments. No one knew just what he was worth but he was reported to be worth at least a million dollars, possibly a great many millions.

On this Saturday afternoon he sat on his veranda just as he had seated himself on his return from his office in the city. He sat in one of the wicker chairs, a wicker stand beside him, and on this he had placed his hat and cane, and he leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed in the attitude of a very tired man. One of the hands that grasped the arm of his chair twitched lightly; it was the slender aristocratic hand of a man of seventy. Presently Nobert, the colored houseman, came through the door carrying a tray on which were a glass of milk, a plate of crackers, a napkin and several dainty sandwiches. He moved the wicker stand a little closer to John Drane's chair, removed the hat and cane, and placed the tray on the stand. John Drane opened his eyes.

"All right, Nobert," he said. "I'll just put this hat and cane in the hall, Mist' Drane," the negro said. "I thought how maybe you might like them sandwiches—"

"Perhaps! Perhaps!" Drane said. "An' Miss Amy say I should ask you is you goin' use the car any more this afternoon. She says if you ain't maybe she go ridin' awhile."

Drane dipped a cracker in milk and ate a little without apparent appetite. "I don't feel well, Nobert," he said. "I certainly don't feel well. Take this stuff away, will you? I can't eat it. I'm not going to use the car; you may tell Amy she can have it. There's nobody come."

"Only Mist' Carter," the negro said. "Him and Miss Amy is playin' tennis out back in the tennis court."

"Alone?" "Couple o' young folks."

"Yes. When you go out there, Nobert, tell young Carter I want to see him. No hurry—tonight or tomorrow will do; whenever he has time. And tell Mrs. Vincent to see that the yellow guest room is ready for a guest. I'm expecting a man to stay a few days."

"Yes, sir," Nobert said, and he took up the tray and went. He coughed as he reached the door, coughed so hard that he had to pause with the tray resting on a ledge. It was the distressing cough of a man suffering from tuberculosis.

"You want to be careful of that cold of yours," John Drane said, as if the cough had annoyed him. "Yes, I'm bein' careful of it," Nobert said and added, as he opened the door; "Miss Vincent she's jus' fairly; she ain't no more than fairly. No, sir."

John Drane's fingers tapped the arm of his chair nervously. He frowned as his eyes rested on the long tree-studded lawn that ran down to the road. This nervousness was unusual with him, ordinarily he was so calm and cold and unmoved by even the most exciting events that in the district surrounding Wall Street he was called the Human Sphinx—silent, stern, unfathomable.

without a word, he wrote a check; sometimes he merely said, "I am not interested." He took no part in social affairs. As time passed he did become interested in some of the financial concerns—he became a director of one of the banks, and was a regular attendant at its board meetings—but he was known mainly, until automobiles made horses a nuisance for his fine horses. His coachman always drove him to the trains and met him on his return until the time came when he bought an automobile; after that his chauffeur always drove him to his office just around the corner from Wall Street on Broadway. He was not so much a peculiar man as a self-sufficing one. In the deals he made in Wall Street he played a lone hand. He never took part in syndicates, never allied himself with groups. And some of his deals were sensationally profitable. It was the amazing effrontery of some of these deals that had attracted attention to him sufficiently to warrant his being given a sobriquet of his own—The Human Sphinx. He would not talk of his deals or of the market or of anything. The moment he reached the city he was, for all practical purposes, mute.

It was not long before Westcote knew he was an extremely wealthy man. Solicitors for a new hospital, going to John Drane in the hope of getting him to give some hundreds of dollars or perhaps a thousand, came away from the house with a check for an even hundred thousand. There had been no wasted words. "Yes, I approve of it; I will give you something," he had said and, turning to the desk, he had written the check. The solicitor, glancing at it, had thought it was for a thousand dollars and had been profuse in his thanks; not until the check was turned in to the treasurer was it discovered that it was for the amazing hundred thousand. The check went through the bank and was paid without question.

"Well, the bony old son-of-a-gun!" the treasurer of the hospital exclaimed. "He must have a heart in his dried-up carcass after all, even if he don't look it!" At seventy John Drane was still as bony as ever, but "dried-up" did not describe him, nor had it ever. He was thin almost to emaciation, but it was a soft thinness; his skin was not dried nor leathery, and his

face had not so much wrinkled as fallen into jowls and folds. His cheeks were drawn down below his cold grey eyes and when he removed his eye glasses the hollows below the eyes were almost ghastly, but even at seventy he was minutely careful of his body and dress, almost dandified. He shaved twice a day, once in the morning and once at noon, for he had a complete shaving outfit at his office. In a small dressing-room there he also changed his linen at noon; he could not bear soiled linen.

He was a tall man, or his thinness made him seem tall, and now he arose from his chair as one of the nondescript black taxicabs of the town entered his driveway. "Ah!" he exclaimed, and then frowned, because a second taxicab had followed the first.

The two cabs, following the wide sweep of the drive, one cab following close on the wheels of the other, drew up before the veranda and their doors opened simultaneously. From the second the passenger was quick to alight, a small man all in black, and he glanced toward John Drane. The millionaire, still frowning, raised a finger and touched his lips—a gesture so brief that it was hardly observable, but the man in black caught it and nodded that he understood. From the first cab the passenger had considerable trouble alighting. He was a huge man, broad of shoulder and hip, and he was trying to bring with him a huge yellow oilboard suitcase, in size proportioned to himself. He had the awkwardness of a man not accustomed to the frequent use of cabs and when he finally stood on the gravel his face was red and perspiring and he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand before he dug into his pocket for the cab fare.

"Black my cats!" he cried. "Come mighty near never gettin' out of your shebang, son. Half a dollar, hey? 'Tain't bad; here's a dime for you."

He picked up his suitcase and turned to the steps. "Well, black my cats!" he cried. "You turned old Johnnie Drane! If you ain't just as bony and skinny as you was when we was kids! Well, now, who'd have thought I'd ever be shakin' hands with Skinny Drane away down east here, on the front porch of a regular blamed old palace like this! How are you, anyhow, you old rascal? Good, old Skinny Drane! Well! Well! Well!"

"Simon, I'm glad to see you," John Drane said, taking the fat man's hand. "Leave your luggage there, my man will take charge of it. It's good to see you again, Simon. I never see anyone from Riverbank—none of them ever come east. Yes, it's good to see you."

He turned then to the smaller man in black. "Dart," he said to him, "I'd like you to meet an old friend of mine, a man I haven't seen for—how long is it, Simon? Twenty-five years?"

"Black my cats, no, John! Thirty-five, anyway. I wasn't to home when you was there twenty-five years ago," the fat man said. "I'd gone down to Kansas City to try to find that boy of mine, but you wouldn't remember that, I guess. Thirty-five years!"

"Simon Judd, from my old home town of Riverbank, Iowa," John Drane said, completing the introduction. "And my good friend William Dart," he added. "You've heard me speak of Riverbank, Dart?"

"Quite frequently; quite frequently," Dart said. "I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Judd. Any friend of Mr. Drane's, of course—Yes, indeed, I've heard Mr. Drane speak of Riverbank! Yes, frequently."

They were interrupted by a young girl who came hurriedly and merrily around the house, half running and carrying a tennis racket in her hand. She evidently had expected to find Mr. Drane alone and had been eager to say something, but now she put it off, seeing that Drane had visitors.

(Continued Next Week.)

A lady brought her little boy to school on opening day and said to the teacher:

"Little Bernie is so delicate. If he is bad—and sometimes he is—just whip the boy next to him; that will frighten him and make him behave."

"Quick, Bob, a wild cat's just run into the house with your wife!"

"Wall, he'll jes' have to get out the best way he can."

Jim: "When she gave you a kiss did you pay it back?"

Tom: "No, I wanted to keep it so I ran away."

The Patient: "Doctor, I snore so loudly I wake myself up!"

The Doctor: "That is easy to overcome. Sleep in the next room."

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