

THE HUMAN SPHINX

By Ellis Parker Butler

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F.E. WATSON

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

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 is murdered. The dead man is first seen by Josie the maid, then by Amy Drane and Simon Judd. The latter faints.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

The announcement of Dr. Blessington that the body of the murdered person above stairs was the body of a woman and not of a man did not shock Amy Drane as much as cause her amazement. The shock had come when she faced the blood stained body of her supposed uncle John and her mind was still so dulled by that shock that she did not immediately grasp what the doctor was telling her.

"A woman? Uncle John was a woman?" she repeated gropingly. "But what—that couldn't be, you know. Why, he's always been a man. I don't know what you mean, doctor."

"The murdered person in the bed upstairs there," the doctor said, "is—or was—a woman. I am merely stating the fact. I thought you should know it immediately as you are, I understand, the only relative here."

"I don't understand it," Amy said. "Why, it's dreadful, isn't it? Oh, it is horrible! It's like some frightful nightmare! It doesn't seem as if it could be true, any of it."

"It is only too true," the doctor said. He looked at the girl with keen professional eyes. "You don't feel that this is too much for you? The shock and the strain must be considerable, but you seem a normal sort of person. What I mean exactly is that if you feel too nervous over this I can give you a simple bromide until your nerves recover from the shock."

"No, thank you," she said. "I think I'll be all right."

"Are you going to be here for awhile?" he asked Simon Judd. "I suppose you will," he added with a slight smile, "considering the circumstances and that the police will have to be finding a murderer. Just keep an eye on this young lady, will you? I'll leave my card; it has my telephone number. If she seems to be about to flop just send for me. Not," he added, "that I think you'll have to. Have you anyone, by the way," he asked Amy, "who could stay here with you a few days? I'd suggest that you go elsewhere, but I have a notion the police will want you here, until they've done some questioning, at least."

"I'm not afraid to stay here, I think," Amy said. "No; Mr. Judd will be here; I'll not be afraid. I'll have Mr. Carter stay here during the days."

"That's Bob Carter?" the doctor asked.

"Yes. He's—we're great friends. I expect him to come this morning."

"You've not had breakfast yet?" "No; I was waiting for it when—when I heard Josie the maid scream."

"Well, my prescription for you is that you go in now and eat a good breakfast. That will help you more than anything I could give you. And as for the things to be attended to in such cases as this, you may leave them to me. What is your name?" he asked Simon Judd, and Judd told him. "Mr. Judd, I'm sure will act for you as far as necessary. There can be no funeral," he added, to Simon Judd, "until the law has gone through its formalities. However, if I might just speak to you a moment or two."

Amy, as she had been advised, entered the house to try to eat a breakfast, and Dr. Blessington led Simon Judd to the far end of the veranda.

"The funeral arrangements can all be attended to later," he said; "it was not that I wanted to speak about. As soon as possible I will get a proper death certificate, and I suppose William Dart is the man Miss Drane will want to have. He is an old friend of Drane's—of the dead person; one of the few close friends the dead man—woman—had, I think."

"Hold on, now!" Simon Judd said.

"Wait a minute, now! Is that the little fellow with the beard that was here yesterday?"

"I don't know that he was here—" "Dart—William Dart—that's the name. Old fellow about seventy years old or so, ain't he? All dressed in black. That the man?" "You have described him."

"Well, black my cats!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "I was tryin' to think what that feller looked like, and all I could think of was undertaker. And he is one, is he? Well, now, maybe he won't want him after all. I don't know but what maybe he's mixed up in this some way, doc. I don't want to keep trade away from any friend of John's—or whoever it is up there—but you might give me the name of another funeral man while you're about it."

"Later, if necessary," the doctor said. "There will be ample time. What I wanted to urge was that you keep your eye on this girl. I don't want to alarm you needlessly but until we know more about this affair it is best to try to be safe. What I mean is that we don't know yet that this murder is not the work of a maniac; perhaps a maniac here in this house. If one murder has been done another may be attempted, you see? Probably there is nothing in the idea, but keep an eye on Miss Drane. Don't let her be another victim, Judd."

"I'll look out for her the best I can, doc," Simon Judd said, "and you can bet on that. She's a nice kid, this Amy is. But how about it being a murder all so sure? You talk like you knew it wasn't a suicide."

"It was no suicide," said the doctor positively. "There are good reasons for knowing it was not. The blow that drove the knife into the heart was a far more powerful blow than that old woman could have struck; death was so instantaneous that a suicide could not have withdrawn the knife from the wound; and, finally, there was no knife in the room. It was murder no doubt about that, sir."

"Ain't it a shame, now!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "When this man Brennan comes," the doctor continued, "you can tell him I will be back in an hour or so—I have a call I must make now. You had better get some breakfast yourself; you're apt to have a long and hard day."

Dr. Blessington turned away, but Simon Judd called him back.

"What I don't see, doc," he said, "is how you didn't know this was a woman all the while. You're the family doctor, ain't you?" "That's rather peculiar, too," he said, frowning a little. "I am the family doctor here; I have a larger bill here each month than with any house in Westcote; I'm called here again and again. But I've never been asked to so much as feel John Drane's pulse or look at his tongue! The man—or woman—has never been sick, or if she has she never called me. The servants have had all my attention, and plenty of it, too."

"That colored man sure has a bad cough," said Simon Judd. "They're all sick," said Dr. Blessington. "I never knew such a household of sick help. It's as bad as a hospital; I don't see how a person can bear to have so much sickness around. But John Drane—or this woman who pretended to be John Drane—has certainly been good to them. I've never known her to discharge a servant for ill health; she's had me here twenty times a month. A good woman, even if she did choose to masquerade as a man."

"Well, I've read of such doin's before," Simon Judd said philosophically, "and I don't know that I blame some of 'em for wantin' to wear man clothes and let on they're men. Sort of queer, though, somehow."

"It is queer," said the doctor. "It is apt to be queerer than we imagine." Dick Brennan, the detective, arrived by that universal vehicle, the taxicab, while Amy Drane and Simon Judd were at breakfast. As he turned from the cab, after having slammed the door, he cast his eye over the Drane house, registering certain salient features: "Three story mansard-roofed house—painted white—veranda full width of house in front—tuted pillars,

approximately six feet in diameter supporting the third floor mansard projection—"

His brain registered physical objects in this way, a result of his innumerable appearances on the witness stand against criminals he has tracked down. A silver watch was never a silver watch to Brennan—it was "one white metal watch, hunting case No. 1,249,563, fourteen jewel movement No. 985,003." For Brennan no one ever lived at seven hundred and sixty-five South Street but at seven six five South Street. For Brennan no one ever stood on the corner of Elm Street and Grand Avenue; he stood "on South-west corner of intersection of Elm Street and Grand Avenue." For Brennan gold was "yellow metal"; it was not for Brennan to decide which was which. Not on the witness stand.

In no respect, except that he resembled thousands of detectives, did Dick Brennan resemble a detective. He resembled no one in particular except himself; you were apt to say to yourself when you saw him "I know that man!" and then, immediately, "No, I'm wrong—I know someone who looks quite a little like that man." You say this of people resembling the clerk, who waits on you in the grocery. Dick Brennan's face was so like thousands of other faces that it was hard to remember. Not infrequently this was of value to him in his work. A man who so nearly resembled many other men could easily make himself look unlike himself.

Dick Brennan was forty-two, but not looked over thirty. For twenty years he had been picking up criminals. He had never "studied" crime, but the ways and habits of criminals had soaked into him; an understanding of their probable actions and reactions had become instinctive in him; this was one reason why he was so valuable; another reason was that he had a brain that was able to recognize the times when a criminal was not acting according to rule. He could think when he had to.

Brennan was not particularly annoyed because he had been put on this case on a Sunday morning. He had planned to see a football game that afternoon but his intention had been to pick up a couple of pickpockets there, if they were still

working the football crowds, and a murder was apt to be more interesting. He followed the circular drive to the veranda, glancing past the house toward the back where the drive curved farthest and when he had mounted to the veranda he rang the bell. Norbert, the colored houseman, came to the door.

"I'm the detective assigned to this case," he said without flourish. "The body upstairs or downstairs?" "Upstairs, sir; yes, sir," Norbert assured him. "Two cops up there; you can go right on up. Should I take your hat, sir? No; you goin' take it with you. Right up these stairs. Yes, sir!"

At the head of the stairs one of the officers greeted him with a "Hello, Dick!" and Brennan replied "Hello, Joe!"

"Mean piece of business this is, Dick," the officer said.

"Stabbing is it? What was that about it being an old lady?"

(Continued Next Week.)

The secretary of the bar association was very busy and very cross one afternoon, when his telephone rang.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped.

"Is this the City Gas Works?" asked a woman's voice.

"No, madam," roared the secretary. "This is the Bar Association."

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of the City of Louisville." "Ah," came from the lady's end in the sweetest of tones, "I didn't miss it so far, after all, did I?"

Jiggs: "Saw a woman yesterday stop on the street, turn down her

stocking and dig out a flea. What do you think of that?" Wiggs: "That must be a case of the wicked bee where no man pursueth."

Father: "Now that you've fin-

ished with college, my boy, hadn't you better be looking out for a job?" Son: "Not on your life, old thing. Let the blighters scramble for me."

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