

# THE HUMAN SPHINX

By Ellis Parker Butler

ILLUSTRATIONS BY K.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 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 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. After further questioning, she is asked about Dart. Meanwhile Judd has told the story of his acquaintance with the actual John Drane in Riverbank.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"No, nothing. He was uncle John's friend a long while—long before I came here," Amy said. "They have played cards together many evenings."

"Never quarreled?"

"No."

"You've not noticed anything queer about the servants?" Brennan asked after a moment.

"Do you mean that they were sickly?" Amy asked.

"Are they?"

"Yes, I think they are all sickly. I don't know why uncle John had such sickly servants, unless he was so kind hearted. Dr. Blessington is here nearly every day for one or another of them, some one of them is always in bed. It makes it very hard for Mrs. Vincent, the housekeeper, but I'm afraid she's the sickest of any."

"But aside from that you've not noticed anything queer in them. Anything you might call craziness, any mania?"

"Oh, no; never anything like that," Amy said.

"You don't know of any enemies your uncle had?"

"No; he never spoke of any."

"He had business in New York hadn't he? Had an office there?"

"Yes," Amy said, and told him the address, which Brennan jotted down in his notebook. "He was a speculator, I think. He would wait and buy a great lot of some one kind of stocks and then they would go up and he would sell. I think he always made a great deal of money that way. I don't really know much about that. They can tell you more at his office. His manager there is Rufus Lodermann. He is quite an old man and he has been with uncle for a long while, I think."

Brennan jotted down this name in his notebook.

"Who else is there? You don't know? No matter—I can look that up," the detective said, putting his book in his pocket again. "And I think that is all I have to ask you now, Miss Drane, unless you can tell me something about the servants—who they are and where they came from."

"I think Mrs. Vincent, the housekeeper, can tell you more about that," Amy said. "I've not really said much attention to that. I've always felt I wasn't wanted to interfere. Mrs. Vincent had been here quite a while when I came, and uncle was old and liked to have things as they were. He didn't seem to want to have me do anything but enjoy myself."

"But you were always ready to do your share if anything turned up," said Brennan smiling. "I can see that, Miss Drane."

"Of course," Amy said. "It wasn't that I didn't want to."

"Mr. Drane just did not seem to want you to bother with the servants and the household affairs and so on; that was it, wasn't it?"

"Yes; he never said much but that was what I felt," she replied.

"I'm trying not to be unpleasant, asking so many questions," Brennan said, "but this whole thing is queerish, as you understand—John Drane being a woman and being murdered this way—and I have to get into my head the best picture of the household as it was, the best picture I can. How was your uncle about money?"

Amy wrinkled her brow, trying to get the meaning of the question.

"Do you mean with me?" she asked. "He paid me an allowance, always on the first of the month. It was fifty dollar while I was at school, but when I came here he gave me a hundred dollars a month. I haven't used nearly all of it. I asked him what I should do with the rest and he told me I could put it in a savings bank, and I did. The house expenses he settled with Mrs. Vincent—once a month, I think. He seemed particular about them."

"He was a woman," suggested Brennan, "and household bills were in his line, possibly. Did he keep much money in the house? Had he a safe here? Did he bring securities home, do you know?"

"No, nothing like that. He used checks almost always."

"No jewelry to amount to anything?"

"He never wore jewelry at all; not even a ring."

"There was a scarf pin," Brennan reminded her.

"Yes; that was all the jewelry he had," Amy said.

"I thought, perhaps, as he was a woman," Brennan explained, "he might have a woman's usual liking for jewels. Suppose we see Mrs. Vincent."

Bob Carter volunteered to find

Mrs. Vincent and while he was on his way Brennan lighted a cigarette. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and looked out over the lawn.

"You come purty near bein' a first class detective, don't you?" Simon Judd asked, hitching forward in his chair he filled to overflowing.

"I'm not the worst in the world," Brennan said. "There are better. We've some fine men over in New York. Our men are a lot better than we have lots of crimes and we don't get every crook, but it's a bad mess over there. I do well enough. It's not as bad here as it is in Manhattan."

"That's so; that's likely," Simon Judd agreed. "And we ain't got it near as bad out to Riverbank. If you was out there you wouldn't have much trouble at all, I reckon."

"There are tough problems everywhere," Brennan said. "Any place may turn out a hard problem at any time."

"That's how I think about it," Simon Judd said. "That's why I kept pesterin' them out there until they said they'd make me chief of police. 'Black my cats!' I says to them; 'The ain't no tellin' when you're goin' to need fust class detective ability.' I guess," he chuckled, "they don't think overly much of me at that! Think I'm some sort of fat old fool, mostly. And I don't know but what I am. The ain't no fool like an old fool, is the? What you think? Am I a fool to go takin' up detective as a life work when I'm along past seventy years old?"

"I'll reserve my opinion on that," Mr. Judd, Brennan smiled. "I can't remember any man who took up the investigative work at that age, but I've known some men who took up crime as old as that and did quite well at it."

"A detective has to be slicker than a criminal, that's the pest of it," Simon Judd said. "And it's so blame hard for them folks to take a fat man serious out there to home. Especially a man that's mostly clung to jobs where he could sleep most of the time, like livery-stablin'. I clung to livery-stablin' as long as I could, and that's a fact, but these here automobiles has given the business a black eye, and if a man goes into the garage business he's got to be lively and wide awake all the time. Now, a detective—in a town like Riverbank, Iowa—"

"Can sleep most of the time," laughed Brennan.

"That's the idee!" Simon Judd chuckled. "Particular if he's not on the force. If he's just a policeman he's got to be out and around, but if he's chief of police and detective he's got to spend quite a lot of time in meditation—sittin' in his office in a chair tipped back

against the wall with his eyes closed. Looked like a good job to me, so I got shut of my livery stable and pestered the life out of 'em until I got the job, startin' January first next."

"Good job," smiled Brennan.

"Yes, or I wouldn't have wanted it," said Simon Judd. "But the main thing when a man hammers down a job like that is to be able to hang onto it, and that's why I figured I'd come East here and learn the detective business from A to Z. I says to myself 'If I can get them slick New York detectives to let me help hunt up some murderer or something, I'll learn a lot, and when I come back and catch a couple of crooks right here in Riverbank the folks ain't never goin' to let nobody throw me out!'"

"Brennan looked up at the old man's face suddenly, but all he saw was good nature and smiling cheerfulness.

"This murder occurred very opportunely," Brennan said.

"That's what I was goin' to say," Simon Judd replied. "Just like it couldn't have been handier. So that fetches me to what I'm goin' to say—what'd you say if I was to go sort of partners with you and the two of us together hunt out who done this crime?"

"We're always glad to have any assistance we can from any source whatever," Brennan told Judd.

"Yes, I reckon," said the fat man. "Only that ain't my idee. I want you should say we'll work at this case together, so's I can get the inside of how you fellows go at it. What say to it?"

Once more Brennan looked Simon Judd in the face. What he sought was the eye of an insane man—the eye of a man who might have come to this house and murdered John Drane to make a case worth solving. Or, perhaps, the eye of a man who had held a grudge against John Drane and had come here to satisfy it. What he saw, if he could judge, was the keen eye of a man who was not such a fool as he looked, the keen laughing eye of a man who, possibly, was laughing at the detective good naturedly while laughing at himself. "This," Brennan said to himself, "is a man who is laughing at me because he knows something I don't know!"

"I won't be more trouble to you than need be," Simon Judd said. "Only thing is it would be quite an experience to me to work hand in arm, so to say, with a real detective like you are."

"I think we can manage it," Brennan said.

"Black my cats, that's fine!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "Amy, that fixes that fine! I'm goin' to pitch right in and work at this thing until we get it all cleaned up and the murderous person put right where

he ought to be. Fine! Now, first off, girl, you go up to my room and, if them officers has got through rummagin' in my baggage, fetch me down a note book I've got in my valise up there. It's a blank one, Amy, without anything wrote in it yet. I didn't know whether real detectives used note books or not, but I see Brennan does, and I want to do this thing right. It's right down in the bottom of the valise, Amy."

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The girl went into the house and Simon Judd looked after her. When he saw she was gone he drew closer to Brennan.

"Now that you and me are in cahoots on this business, partner," he said, "we want to start off clean and clear and no favors. What I know you want to know, if not nothin' no good. And there's somethin' wrong here right at the start."

"It bein'—?" Brennan asked.

"The girl, Amy, here," Simon Judd whispered. "She ain't what she says she is."

(Continued next week.)

**POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT.**  
Independent Candidate for Sheriff: To the Electorate of Morrow County:  
I hereby announce myself an independent candidate for the office of Sheriff of Morrow County at the general election on Nov. 6, 1928, and shall appreciate your support.  
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—Paid Adv.

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