

# THE HUMAN SPHINX

By Ellis Parker Butler

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KE. WATSON

"Yes, the first," Abner Dart said so weakly that they could hardly hear him. "The first was a house-keeper she had, named Caroline Barstall. 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. Barstall 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 Barstall 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 is 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!" 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 villainess 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 over the garage," Norbert said, "an' she won't let nobody come up. She's got hold of a knife and I reckon she's plum gone 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 said, "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 after Simon Judd went to bed?"

"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 she 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 what 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 in 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 said crime being revenge, and the crime being actuated by love and affection for the said George Firmandick, now deceased."

"Write all that down before you forget 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.)

IS STUDENT BODY PREXY.

Edwin Hughes, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Percy Hughes, formerly of this city, is prexy of the student body of McLaughlin Union high school at Milton-Freewater and is also captain of the football

team. He is a senior. Their daughter, Miss Anita, is a junior at Whitman college in Walla Walla, where she has been doing fine, but is compelled to be away from her studies at present because of serious illness which will necessitate an operation to be undergone immediately. The younger son of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, Arthur, is attending the home school at Umapine, as a freshman in the high school department. Headache, dizziness, nausea, stomach disorders are often due to eye-strain. Scientific eye examination will give you facts about your eyes. Dr. Tyler of Bend will be at Peterson's store, Heppner, Nov. 4 and 5.


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