

THE HUMAN SPHINX

by Ellis Parker Butler

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F.E. WATSON

What's happened before—
John Drane, prosperous Westcott man of mystery, is visited by William Dart and by a boyhood chum, Simon Judd. As he speaks to them, a young girl, Amy Drane, approaches them. Now go on with the story!

"What was it, Amy?" John Drane asked.
"Oh, nothing," she said. "It was only about Robert; whether you wanted to see him now, but if you have visitors—"

"This evening, perhaps," John Drane said. "But, one minute, Amy. This is an old friend of mine—"

"Chum, black my cats, when we were kids, why don't you say, huh?" Simon Judd demanded. "He's afraid to tell how long ago that was, huh?"

"Yes, one of my boyhood chums," John Drane said, smiling slightly. "Simon Judd, in fact. And Judd, this is my grand niece Amy."

The girl gave Judd her hand and for a minute or two they talked, the girl smiling and Judd laughing for no reason but because of his own unfeeling good humor; then she said, having learned that the jolly fat man might stay a day or two, that Bob was waiting for her and, after a word of greeting to Dart, she hurried away. She did not like Dart; she had never liked him; she could not imagine what her uncle John saw in him.

Dart stood stroking his gray beard, studying Simon Judd as the big man climbed the veranda steps. From the rear the movements of the man from Riverbank were almost grotesque as he hoisted his great bulk from step to step.

"I think," Dart said, when John Drane turned at the top of the steps, "I'll come back later on—tomorrow, perhaps."

Drane scowled his annoyance.
"Now, don't do that, William," he said. "You know that I don't like to have my plans disarranged. You said you would stay the night and I have counted on it. I want to thrash that matter out with you. Don't be a fool."

"I only thought, as you had Mr. Judd here—"

"Now, that's just why I want you to stay," John Drane said. "If I see and I get to talking boyhood days we'll never go to bed. Don't you see? We'll be talking over the old days. We'll never stop."

"Can't stop me, once I get started, that's sure enough," laughed Simon Judd. "Talkin' my long suit, and always was, I guess. But don't you folks let me bust up any plans you have made. If you want to talk, I've got a lot of stuff I got to read over

some time—stuff I got down to New York to get hold of. I been made chief of police back home, John."

"That is interesting. At seventy, too, Simon," Drane said.

"Yes, I guess they got around to where they thought they needed some brains at last," Simon Judd chuckled.

"Folks do, sometimes. Yes, sir, made me chief of police of Riverbank, sure as you're a foot high."

William Dart had come up the steps and taken one of the wicker chairs. He put his elbows on its arms and now began revolving his thumbs, leaning forward and looking off over the lawn.

"Yes, sir, John," Simon Judd continued cheerfully, "I been all my life tryin' one thing and another but you can't discourage a good man; sooner or later he's goin' to find out what he's made for. There was one time I tried preachin' and it looked awhile like that was goin' to be it, but I ain't got the voice for it—when I go to let loose the voice gets squeaky on me. There was awhile I tried the butcher business, but the sight of blood always did make me faintish, so I sort of gave that up, too. But I got the right thing now, John. Pretty near ever since I was a boy I've had a leanin' toward it."

"Being a policeman?" William asked.

"Crime tracin'," explained Simon Judd, turning toward the little man in black. "Huntin' out who done the crime. What you call detective work. I feel I got genius that way."

"And that's what brought you to New York, Simon?" Drane asked.

"Are you on the track of a criminal?"

"Lands o' goodness, no!" laughed Simon Judd, slapping his huge thigh.

"Why, I ain't started in yet, John! I don't get my badge until first of the year. No sir! I come down here to have a look around and see how these New York detective fellers manage the business. And I must say they're right kindly to strangers; told me a lot of things; gave me a lot of pamphlets and one thing and another. It's goin' to help me a lot, John; I got the genius for it, all right, but I got to brush up on the technic more or less, I guess, though, maybe I'll get along all right."

Norbert, as if knowing what was desired, appeared on the veranda with cigars—long slender light cigars of admirable quality. Dart and Drane took cigars, but Judd hesitated.

"Mostly I smoke a pipe, John," he said, "and when I do go in for a cigar I kind of like 'em dark and strong. But, I don't know; I'll risk one. Now, if you fellers had anything to talk over—"

"We can do that later," John Drane said. "Tell me about Riverbank; not

many changes, I suppose?"

"Well, yes," Simon Judd said, puffing at his cigar. "Say, this ain't such a bad smoke, is it? Yes, quite a few changes, John. Main Street ain't changed much, but out around—you'd be surprised. Say, that niece of yours is mighty nice girl, ain't she? You didn't say she was your niece, did you?"

"I said she was my grand-niece," said John Drane, and William Dart looked up at him suddenly. There was a question in his eyes—a question and fright. If he feared anything, however, there was no sign of anything to fear in Simon Judd's face.

The fat man was finding unexpected pleasure in his cigar.

"She's making her home with me now—yes," John Drane answered.

"That's nice—nice to have young folks around," Simon Judd said.

"And, as I was sayin' about the changes in Riverbank—you know that field where we used to go to hunt rabbits? Bailey's field, John? Well, you'd never know it—all built up with houses; streets and all, gas and electric, sewers, everything! You remember little Ross Gartner—father used to run the Western Hotel? He developed that part of town—"

With Simon Judd talking and John Drane asking a question now and then, they remained there on the veranda until dark, when Norbert called them to dinner.

On Sunday mornings John Drane and his household usually slept later than usual and breakfast was not served until nine. At nine, this morning, Mrs. Vincent—who for many years had sat at the foot of John Drane's table behind the coffee pot and toaster—stood in the breakfast room waiting for her employer. She stood near her chair and she seemed to be suffering, for her eyes were closed and she held one hand against the small of her back. She was actually in great pain, for she was a diabetic and at times the pains caused by her condition were almost more than she could bear. Presently, as no one appeared in the breakfast room other than the maid Josie, Mrs. Vincent drew out her chair and seated herself, ready to arise at momentary notice.

Her face was unusually pale, of the hue natural to those suffering from her disease, but she was dressed as always, neatly.

"Josie," she said presently and with considerable effort, "I think you had better have Norbert call Mr. Drane and the other men again. They can't have gotten up."

"Yes, ma'm, the maid said. "If they felt the way I do they never would get up."

"You're not so well this morning?"

"Oh, I feel just awful!" the girl exclaimed, almost in tears. "I don't hardly feel like I could drag through the day. I'm that weak, Mrs. Vincent!"

"Your heart again?"

"Yes, like always, only last night it pained me worse than ever it did. It was something terrible, Mrs. Vincent."

"I don't know what's the matter with us—all sick like we are," the housekeeper said. "You better tell Norbert."

The girl went to find the negro houseman. She returned almost immediately.

"He's got one of them awful coughing spells again," she said. "I guess I'll have to go myself, and I don't feel hardly able."

She looked at Mrs. Vincent, but that poor woman was suffering.

"I guess you'll have to go, Josie," she managed to say. "I've got to save myself for breakfast; Mr. Drane don't like it for me to be away from breakfast," and the girl went.

On the veranda—for it was there the small family gathered before breakfast in nice weather—Amy Drane was sitting on the arm of a chair looking through the pages of the huge Sunday newspaper, and she had just opened wide a double page of brown illustrations when she heard a piercing scream from the floor above and the fall of a body to the floor.

She threw aside the paper and, swinging open the screen door, ran up the wide stairs. In the hall Simon Judd, trousersed but coatless and with his suspenders hanging, was coming down the passage from the yellow guest room as hastily as his huge bulk could move, and at the open door of John Drane's room the girl Josie lay outstretched on the floor unconscious.

Amy Drane was about to bend down to raise her when her eyes glimpsed her uncle on his bed and she stood white and speechless, petrified with horror. The old man, her uncle, lay with his head thrown back against the pillow, his glassy eyes staring at her, and the front of his pajama coat was sodden with blood from a spot over the heart to the bed covers drawn close about him.

"What's the matter?" Simon Judd asked, and then he too, looking past Amy, saw the dead man. "He's been murdered!" he exclaimed, and Amy felt something huge lean against her back. "Black my cats!" Simon Judd said weakly; "I'm goin' to faint!" and he did, his vast bulk thrusting Amy into the room as he fell across the body of Josie the maid.

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HAS PLAN TO SOLVE FARMERS' PROBLEMS

Would Have Agricultural and Industrial Centers in Close Proximity

Factory whistles, instead of the farm bell of another day, will call agricultural workers from their labors if the plan of T. R. Preston, president of the American Bankers association, calling for building up of farm and factory communities side by side, is followed out.

Preston, as president of the Hamilton National Bank of Chattanooga, Tenn., has had abundant opportunity to observe the problems of farmers in regions surrounding that southern city. Commenting on the national farm problem in The Farm and Fireside, Preston declares that bringing the factory to the agricultural community will go far toward remedying existing financial difficulties of the farmer. He calls attention once more to the fact that not only does the farmer receive a small share of the dollar his far away customer pays, but the price that he gets from his nearby customers is affected by the fact that the base price is decided at so great a distance.

"I know of nothing that can do more to correct this unsatisfactory situation," he says, "than mixing the farms and the factories—the decentralization of industry, as it is often called."

In communities where such combinations of farm and factory groups have occurred, he continues, economic improvement has been immediate.

"The farm problem in the United States is so important," he concludes, "that we can afford to overlook no possible contribution to its solution. Few of the problem's careful students believe that it can be solved by legislative panaceas. By taking it apart, and examining the phases one by one we can see how the difficulties can be corrected."

Claims for Mettle
Don't mistake hard boiledness for courage. The fact that there's iron in your soil doesn't mean that you are a man of mettle.—Farm and Fireside.

TELLS OF CONTACTS WITH STAGE STARS

Old Custodian of Manuscripts Says Theatre People Are Human

Stars of the stage in the United States are more thoughtful, more kind and generous as they grow older, according to Peter Mason, negro custodian of manuscripts and clippings at the Empire Theatre for the past 33 years.

His work there has caused him to come into daily contact with such famous actors and actresses as Maude Adams, Ethel Barrymore and the other famous members of her family, with the late John Drew and Charles Frohman. In many cases these stars have looked to Peter to care for their mail, to tell them about some particularly favorable comment on their work that has appeared in a newspaper or to take personal calls for them.

"People often ask me," said Peter in an interview published in The American Magazine, "how the stars act behind the scenes or off the stage. That's a question I like to answer. Mostly they behave just as you would expect great men and women to do. As a rule, as they grow older and go higher up the kinder, more thoughtful and generous they are. I believe stage folks are the biggest hearted people in the world anyway."

Charles Frohman was known by Peter as "the best loser," due to his ability to come back to the office whistling after a particularly bad first night. John Drew he considered the perfect gentleman.

Peter was born on Fortieth street, just a few blocks from what is now Times Square. "I was just a common little Broadway tough when I came to the Empire," he says.

New Brougham Sweeps Clean
"The new brougham, fresh from the factory, skidded," says a Jersey Journal story, "and plunged into a cluster of pushcarts, sweeping them over one by one."—Farm & Fireside.

It's Nice to Have It
Culture and education and wealth do not create happiness, but a few poor people would risk contentment for a few more shekels.—American Magazine.

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