

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 Drane 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."

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"No; not a reason; not the slightest reason!" Amy declared with absolute positiveness. "I can't even imagine why anyone should want to kill my—uncle."

"And as far as you know, there was no one in the house last night but your uncle, Mr. Judd here, Mr. Dart and the servants?" Brennan asked her. "I know," he added, "that you can't say whether others may not have come in unknown to you."

Amy's eyes turned to Bob Carter. "Yes, I was in the house last night," Carter said.

"About when, Carter?" Brennan asked.

"Late," Carter said. "After eleven and before twelve. Mr. Drane said he wanted to see me; he sent Norbert to tell me so yesterday afternoon—just before we went for the drive, you remember, Amy? There was no hurry, Norbert said; either last night or today would do. I rather knew what he had on his mind. I had asked him if I could marry Amy, and he had put off answering me. So last night I happened to pass here and I saw the lights in the library and I came in."

"Ring or knock or anything?"

"I went to the library door at that side of the house and knocked on the door, and Mr. Drane let me in," Bob said. "Mr. Drane was with him; no one else. I said good evening to Mr. Dart and Mr. Drane said we could go across the hall to the dining room for a few minutes, and we did. There's one thing I ought to tell you, I guess; just as we were going out Mr. Dart said, 'Now, remember what I told you, John; I don't approve.' It was something like that; he may have said 'I'm against it' or 'I won't have it.' I was rather excited, you see; what Mr. Drane was going to say meant such a lot to me."

"Naturally," agreed Brennan. "Well?"

"That's about all," Carter said. "We went into the dining room and Mr. Drane talked to me awhile. It was mostly about my prospects and what I was planning to do with my life and whether I would be willing to come to this house to live after we were married—Amy and I. He said

we had best travel for a year, or stay elsewhere a year. After that he wanted us here. I told him that was what Amy wanted—it was the only reason she hesitated about marrying; she did not want to leave him. So he said it would be all right."

"I'm so glad, Bob!" Amy cried, "I'm so glad to think he was willing!"

"And then what?" Brennan asked, seeing that Carter was hesitating. "Well, it was rather queer," Carter said, blushing. "I thought it was rather queer then, but it doesn't seem so queer now—not when we know what we know now. He asked if he could kiss me."

"He did?" Brennan exclaimed. "Not quite so brashly as all that," Carter said. "He laughed and laughed and said that if we were French he supposed we would kiss each other on both cheeks. I said I had been kissed, when I was given my cross. 'Then you won't mind if I do kiss you,' he said, and he kissed me. I felt—well, I felt sorry for him, that's how I felt. I thought 'Por old fellow!' I knew nobody around here cared much for him, and he was getting pretty old. That sort of feeling. And now, when I know he was a woman!"

"It's bound to come out now and again," said Brennan tersely. "A woman can only stand so much without affection. The very worst I've ever known came to it now and again. And then what did you do?"

"We talked a few minutes about when the wedding might be, and I said I would have to leave that to Amy. Then he said—"

Carter hesitated a moment but Brennan said nothing. "He spoke about money," Carter went on. "He said he had made his will in Amy's favor and that he was leaving her everything he had. Then he said she was a good girl; he said very nice things about her and said he meant to give her outright a hundred thousand dollars the day she was married, if I did not object. I have nothing of my own, you know. He said that he thought, living in his house and having to be mistress of it, Amy should not be compelled to ask him for money. He meant for the extra expenses, the things I could not pay for. I didn't see anything wrong in that. I didn't see that it had anything to do with my loving Amy. Amy knows it's not anybody's money I care for. So then we shook hands and I came away."

"Through the library again?" Brennan asked.

"No. Mr. Drane let me out by this door."

"So you didn't see Mr. Dart again?"

"No. I went down the driveway there and walked home."

"You haven't any idea what it was Mr. Dart wanted Mr. Drane not to do?"

"Not really," Carter said. "It may be they had been talking over Amy and me and Mr. Dart didn't care for me enough to have me marry Amy. Mr. Drane and Dart were old friends—what they call 'cronies' almost. Or it may have been giving Amy so much money in a lump that Dart objected to. I don't know."

"But your impression was that Mr. Dart referred to the talk you were about to have with Mr. Drane?" Brennan asked.

"That's what I thought," Carter admitted. "I hadn't any doubt of it. I thought to myself 'What business is it of his, anyway?' I don't like him much, somehow."

"And now, Miss Drane," Brennan asked without a pause, "have you ever seen anything that made you think, even in the slightest degree, that your uncle was a woman?"

"No," Amy said without hesitation, and immediately changed her answer to yes! "Never while he was alive," she said. "It never entered my head, not in the very slightest. But now I can see things. He was so kind to me."

"Might not an uncle be kind?" Brennan asked.

"Yes, but not in that way. Affectionate is what I should say, probably. I didn't know, you see—I didn't think—how a man would be, but I can see now, Mr. Brennan, that he was more like—more like a mother in the way he—in the way he kissed me and smoothed my hair. More like a woman, more like a mother."

"Have you any reason for thinking he was your mother?" Brennan asked and Amy stared at him with wide eyes.

"Uncle John my mother?" she gasped and put her fingers to her lips as if in fear. "Oh, he couldn't be my mother—he—"

"You knew your mother?" Brennan asked. "You see, Miss Drane, I don't know any of the facts; I have to ask for them. Did you know your mother?"

Bob Carter frowned with annoyance that Amy should be annoyed. He looked at her and turned to Brennan.

"I can answer that," he said. "Amy told me all that."

"Let her tell me," said Brennan but his tone was kindly.

"I never knew my mother," Amy said.

Brennan leaned forward in his chair. "I'm not digging into this from curiosity," he said. "I have plenty to do without wasting time that way; my job is to find who murdered this woman who posed as John Drane. There may never have been a John Drane—"

"You bet your boots there was!" declared Simon Judd. "John Drane and me was chums, I tell you, when we was boys back there in Riverbank. Regular boys and no mistake, and don't you forget it, mister! You can prove that by me any time you want to."

"There was a John Drane then," said Brennan. "You knew him."

"And I knew him a blame long time, black my cats!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "Why look here—John Drane was born along about when I was, along towards 1853, and we chummed together, thick as thieves, for a long time. Yes, until '83—that was when he went out West. He was thirty years—we was born together as you might say. Sure there was a John Drane!"

"I was going to ask you a few questions later," Brennan suggested. "Ex-cuse me for buttin' in!" Simon Judd said with hearty good nature. "Go right ahead and I'll shut up till you want me."

"I was saying Miss Dane, Brennan said, "that I am only trying to gather

some details of the life of John Drane as he was known here, and matters that might have some bearing on this murder. I know nothing, you understand, and I have to ask questions. You say you did not know your mother—that means she died while you were too young to know her?"

"Yes," Amy said. "You're about how old?"

"I'm seventeen."

"Do you know when your uncle— to call him that—came to Wescote?"

"Yes, I remember hearing that. It was in 1892. He bought this house then. He said not long ago he had owned it thirty-two years."

"And you were not born here?"

"Oh, no!" said Amy. "I was born in California. You see, I'm uncle John's brother's son's child."

"What did you say?" asked Brennan, turning to Simon Judd.

"I'm not saying a word," Judd said. "Ex-cuse me! I forgot myself."

"But you said something," Brennan insisted. "What did you say?"

"All I said," Simon Judd said, "was which brother?"

"Well, which brother was it?" Brennan asked Amy, showing the first impatience he had shown.

"It was Daniel," Amy said. "Daniel went to California and married Mary O'Ryan there, and they had one son—Thomas Drane, who was my father. He married Mary Gartner, but just after I was born they were drowned in a flood. Some river overflowed and they were drowned. Grandfather was dead then, too, and grandmother had died before that. So I was put in an orphanage and that was where uncle John found me."

"He went to California? When was that?"

"I wasn't a year old," Amy said. "It must have been in 1908. Uncle John said he had always corresponded with father and when the letters stopped he was worried. He wasn't well that year and he thought California might do him good—it was in the winter—and he went West for the two reasons. He wanted the warmth and he wanted to find father if he was alive. He found only me."

"And he brought you East?"

"No; not right away. He found a home for me there, lovely people who were always so good to me! They raised me; uncle John used to send them money for my expenses and he wrote me letters—"

"You have some of the letters? They're in the same hand that this uncle John writes, or did write?"

"Yes, exactly the same—a big round hand," Amy said. "So then, when I was old enough, I was sent to a school near Pasadena. I stayed there until I finished, last year. Then uncle John had me come East. He wanted me to live with him, he said."

"She told me all that," Bob Carter said.

"Yes; it was not a secret," Amy said. She waited for Brennan to ask his next question.

"Can you tell me anything that would throw any light on this murder?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Amy answered. "I may think of something but it's all so horrible still."

"You don't know anything out of the way about this William Dart?"


(Continued Next Week)

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SOLVE PROBLEM OF FOOD PLANT ORIGIN

WHERE THEY STARTED

Field Museum Shows Certain Plants Were Indigenous to American Continent; Others Imported

Scientists are solving the problem of when and where various food plants were first cultivated. The origin of many is now definitely known, according to researchers on the staff of Field Museum of Natural History; others are still in dispute.

How some of these problems are solved is illustrated by exhibits at Field Museum. For example, in the last few years scientists have established that certain plants are indigenous to the American continent, and not the result of importations by the early European settlers, through the unearthing of some very ancient pottery on the coast of Peru. These pots, made many centuries before the discovery of America by the white man, are modelled in the shapes of various plants, and thus prove that those plants were grown on this side of the world in those early days, according to Dr. William M. McGovern, assistant curator of South American and Mexican ethnology at the museum. One of the world's best collections of this ancient plant pottery is now on exhibition at Field Museum.

Antedate Conquest

"This potter antedates even the con-

quest of the Peruvian coast by the Inca empire," says Dr. McGovern, "and thus it gives a very definite picture of what American agriculture was like during the period of ancient Peruvian civilization."

Among the plants which the Field Museum collection proves are indigenous to America are peanuts, maize, squashes, pumpkins, beans, potatoes, and the poisonous tuber called mandioka from which tapioca is made. All of these have been used as models for the shape or the decorations of the pottery. From other sources, it is known that pineapples, tobacco, tomatoes, chocolate, and cocoa from which cocaine is made, originated in the Americas. On the other hand, watermelon, believed by most people to be a hundred per cent American product of our southern states, apparently originated thousands of years ago in Africa, says Dr. McGovern, for remains of watermelons and their seeds have been discovered in tombs of ancient Egypt.

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